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Choosing to Labour:
Reconceptualizing Structure and Agency in School-Work Transitions

by

Wolfgang Lehmann ©

A thesis submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Department of Sociology

Edmonton, Alberta
Fall 2003

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Dr. Scott Davies, External Examiner
McMaster University

Date: Sept. 23, 2003

To Audrey

Abstract

This dissertation investigates issues of social inequality, structure, and agency in the school-work transitions process. The study is based on a multi-method comparison of 105 youth apprentices and academic high school students in the cities of Edmonton (Alberta) and Bremen (Germany). Comparing Germany's dual system, firmly embedded in the country's social and economic structure, with Alberta's only recently introduced Registered Apprenticeship Program (RAP) illustrates how young people actively negotiate their transitions from high school given very different social contexts and boundaries. Drawing on the concepts of habitus and cultural capital derived from the work of Bourdieu, but also applying macro-sociological frameworks like Giddens' structuration theory and Beck's notion of individualization in a risk society, my aim was to explain the persistence of social inequality in school-work transitions without foregoing agency.

The data analysis reveals a complex and often contradictory relationship between structural constraints and youth's own perception of their agency. Most participants speak about their school-work transition plans in ways that suggest reflexivity and informed agency. Yet, the range of school-work transition alternatives realistically under consideration is limited by their social status and past experiences at home. Furthermore, the comparative survey data shows that participation in either youth apprenticeships or academic-track programs is strongly influenced by socio-economic status, cultural capital, and institutional factors. This leads to the conclusions that individuals engage with their structural, institutional, and cultural environment and their personal history to

form school-work transition plans that reflect an understanding of their position in the social structure. I call this form of agency habitually-reflexive.

Reconceptualizing agency as both habitual and reflexive allows for the study of agency in processes that have socially reproductive outcomes. Thus, it is possible to understand young people's narratives regarding their school-work transitions as reflecting independent choices, even though they are situated in a context of habitus, cultural capital, and class. Particularly youth apprentices see their entry into the trades as an expression of a preference for, and identity with, working-class ideals of manual work. Their narratives and perceptions overwhelmingly suggest that they were choosing to labour.

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Table of Contents

Chapter 1. Introduction 1

Chapter 2. Setting the Scene: The Policy and Institutional Background 11

- The School-Work Transitions Debate 11
- The Lack-of-Skilled-Workers Debate 14
- Youth Apprenticeship Programs Across Canada 15
- The Alberta Registered Apprenticeship Program (RAP) 19
- Germany's Dual System as a Model 24
  - Secondary Education in Germany 25
  - Description of the Dual System 31
  - Participants in the Dual System 34
- Youth Apprenticeships, Improved Transitions and Reproduction of Inequality? 36
  - Successful Transitions 36
  - Reproducing Inequality 39

Chapter 3. A Review of the Literature on Agency, Structural and Cultural Reproduction in School-Work Transitions 43

- The Human Capital Model 43
- Structural Reproduction 47
  - Persistent Class Inequalities: Stratification and Structural Reproduction 47
  - Streaming and Stratification: Structural Neo-Marxist Explanations 52
  - Status Attainment Research 55
- Agency in the Transitions from High School 57
  - Resistance 58
  - Rational Choice 64
  - Giddens' Structuration Theory 69
  - Individualization, Risk Society and Late Modernity 73
- Bourdieu's Theory of Practice 79
  - Capital 80
  - Field 81
  - Habitus 83
  - Applicability to Transitions Research 88
- Summary 91

Chapter 4. Methodology, Research Questions, and Participant Profiles **97**

Ontology and Epistemology: The Dilemma of Empirically Investigating Structure and Agency 97
Methodological Strategies 100
  Research Questions 102
Data Collection 105
  Selection of Research Sites 105
  Sampling 108
  Data Collection Strategies 113
  Reseach Ethics 121
  Data Analysis 122
  Validity, Reliability, and Generalizability 125
Participant Profiles 127
  Location, Gender, Age, and Ethnicity 127
  Living Arrangements 130
  Apprenticeship Occupations 131
  Educational Attainment of Apprentices 134
  Academic-Track Post-secondary Plans 135

Chapter 5. Contradictory Evidence from the Quantitative and Qualitative Data: When Structure Met Agency **138**

Structural Reproduction: Survey Findings 138
  Parents' Education 138
  Parents' Occupation 141
  Family Income 143
  Cultural Capital 145
Dispositions in their Own Words: "My Paycheque is More Than Your Mom's" 152
Summary 166

Chapter 6. Institutional Context: "And It Was Kind of Hard to Get Information" **171**

Transparency and Flexibility 171
  Flexibility over Transparency: The Canadian System 172
  Transparency over Flexibility: The German System 176
Institutional Context as Constraining 181
  Streaming 183
Labour Market Opportunities 186
Gendered School-Work-Transitions and Welfare Regimes 191
Summary 197

Chaper 7. Social Context: "I'm Doing It and I Hope You'll Support Me in It" 201

Parents 201
Peers 211
Teachers and Counsellors 214
Other Role Models and Influences 219
  Media 222
Summary 225

Chapter 8. Narratives of Reproduction: "It's Just What My Family Does" 229

Habitus and Cultural Capital 232
Risk and Uncertainty 240
Role of the Schools 245
  Relationship with Curriculum 246
  Relationship with Teachers 250
Resistance 252
Summary 259

Chapter 9. Biography Reconstruction as Individual Strategy: "There It's the Real World" 263

Biography Reconstruction 264
  A Note on Gender and Biography Reconstruction 273
Embrace of Workplace Culture 274
Accelerated Maturity 278
Summary 287

Chapter 10. Choosing to Labour: Summary, Conclusions, and Implications 293

Summary of Findings 294
  The Cross-National Context: Structural, Institutional, and Cultural Factors 294
  Participation Patterns 295
  Participants' Perception of Structure and Agency in their Transitions from High School 297
Choosing to Labour: Reconceptualizing Structure and Agency 300
  Choosing to Labour 303
  Habitually-Reflexive Agency 310
Policy Implications 314
  Alternative for Non-academic Students 316
  Integrating Workplace Experience and Academic Learning 318

Policy Suggestions 324
The Future of Germany's Dual System 328
Future Research Needs and Suggestions 330

References 335

Appendix A: Basic Structure of the Education System of the Federal Republic of Germany 357
Appendix B: Sample Parental Consent Letter 358
Appendix C: Sample Parental Consent Form 359
Appendix D: Sample Participant Consent Letter 360
Appendix E: Sample Participant Consent Form 361
Appendix F: Sample Questionnaire (Edmonton RAP Sub-sample) 362
Appendix G: Interview Guide (Edmonton RAP Sub-sample) 371

List of Tables

Table 1. Unemployment Rates in Canada by Age and Gender, 2000 12

Table 2. Selected Youth Apprenticeship Programs, Canada, Provinces 16

Table 3. Youth Unemployment Rates in Canada and Germany by Age Group; 1998..... 25

Table 4. School Leavers, by Type of Qualification, Germany, 1960-1999 30

Table 5. Unemployment Rate in Canada by Educational Attainment and Age Group 37

Table 6. Canadian Population 15 Years and Over and Average Earnings by Highest Degree, Certificate or Diploma, 1996 37

Table 7. Youth Unemployment Rates in Canada and Germany by Level of Educational Attainment and Age Group; 1998 38

Table 8. Sample Matrix 109

Table 9. Study Participants by Location, Type of Program, and Data Collection Method 113

Table 10. Participation by Location, Type of Program and Gender 128

Table 11. Participation by Average Age (rounded) 129

Table 12. All Alberta Apprentices and RAP Participants by Trade as of Dec. 31, 2001; and Study Participants by Trade as of October 31, 2002 132

Table 13. Trades/Occupations of Youth Apprentices, by Location 133

Table 14. Post-secondary Education Plans of Academic Track Students, by Location 136

Table 15. Type of Program by Parents' Highest Level of Education, Edmonton 139

Table 16. Type of Program by Parents' Highest Level of Secondary Education, Bremen 140

Table 17. Type of Program by Parents' Level of Post-secondary Education, Bremen .. 140

Table 18. Type of Program by Parents' Occupation, Edmonton and Bremen Combined 142

Table 19. Type of Program by Father's Occupation and Location 143

Table 20. Type of Program by Family Income Compared to National Average, Edmonton and Bremen Combined 144

Table 21. Type of Program by Family Income Compared to National Average and Location 145

Table 22. Type of Program by Levels of Cultural Capital, Edmonton and Bremen Combined 146

Table 23. Type of Program by Levels of Cultural Capital and Location 147

Table 24. Levels of Cultural Capital by Gender, Edmonton and Bremen Combined 147

Table 25. Program Type by Skills Used in the Home, Edmonton and Bremen Combined (Percent) 149

Table 26. Program Type by Skills Used in the Home and Location 151

Table 27. Select Work Values by Type of Program, Edmonton and Bremen Combined 162

Table 28. Select Work Values by Type of Program and Location 164

Table 29. Attitudes About School, by Type of Program 249

List of Figures

Figure 1. Attitudes About Factors Affecting Achievement of Career Goals, by Type of Program and Location (Percent Important and Very Important) 231

Chapter 1

Introduction

I've always enjoyed working in a trade. It's just what my family does.
Tim, Edmonton youth apprentice

[M]y dad would come home from [construction] work and I'd see what he looks like ... You know, my whole life he's told me not to get into this.
Trent, Edmonton academic-track high school student

[M]y mom and dad both teach... And my mom ... by the time she retires, I'll be pretty much into that field. I'd love to take over her class, maybe team-teach with her for a couple of years.... We were talking about that, my mom and I, and we thought that would be so neat.
Lisa, Edmonton academic-track high school student

Let's begin by looking at three high school students in Edmonton. Tim has just completed his first year of a high school-based youth apprenticeship and is excited about continuing a family tradition of employment in the trades. Trent has decided to attend university, partly in reaction against his father's experiences of hard physical labour on construction sites. Lisa, too, is planning on attending university to become a teacher like her mother, whom she greatly admires. Some key questions regarding the relationship between structure and agency in school-work transitions emerge from these three cases. How did the career plans of Tim, Trent, and Lisa develop? What shapes their dispositions during school-work transitions? Are these dispositions the result of their active and reflexive engagement with their social and institutional environment, or the result of streaming processes over which they have little control?

To investigate these questions of structure and agency in the school-work transitions process, I undertook an extensive multi-method, comparative study of 105 youth apprentices and academic high school students in the cities of Edmonton (Alberta) and Bremen (Germany). My aim was to explore empirically and theoretically innovative ways of explaining the persistence of social inequality without foregoing agency. While drawing on a wide range of theoretical traditions, the study centred on the concepts of *habitus* and *cultural capital*, derived from the work of Pierre Bourdieu. These concepts offered the opportunity to investigate how structural constraints, but also individuals' understanding of their location within a social structure, reproduce inequality.

Initially, the study's roots can be traced to recent policy debates in Canada. While youth unemployment has been a persistent labour market problem in Canada throughout most of the past two decades, provinces like Alberta periodically also experience massive shortages of skilled workers in the trades and other technical occupations. A skilled workforce is considered a necessary cornerstone for a province or country to successfully compete in a technologically advanced, global marketplace. Alberta's recently introduced youth apprenticeship program (Registered Apprenticeship Program, or RAP) is designed to address both issues: offering high school students an alternative to traditional post-secondary education or immediate workforce entry, while also attempting to create interest in the trades as a career option.

Proponents of initiatives like RAP argue that they make school experience more meaningful and offer a way out of the downward spiral of low levels of schooling and labour market failure (e.g., Alberta Apprenticeship and Industry Training Board 1996; Buechtemann, Schupp, and Soloff 1994; Economic Council of Canada 1992; Evans, Taylor, and Heinz 1993; Hamilton 1990). Critics charge such programs with reinforcing existing social inequalities by streaming lower-class children into marginalized career options (Kantor 1994). However, the lack of empirical data on youth apprentices and their motivations for entering these programs makes it virtually impossible to draw any conclusion regarding the pro- or anti-apprenticeship arguments. Furthermore, both proponents and critics of youth apprenticeships have used the German *dual system* of vocational education in support of their arguments, all too often without a proper understanding of its historical, cultural, economic, and political foundations and functions in Germany (Lehmann 2000). My dissertation addresses both of these concerns.

From an educational policy perspective, a better understanding of why students participate in RAP (or not), how parents and peers might influence this decision-making process, and what external social factors play important roles may help policy makers and school staff provide a more effective mix of school-work transition programs as well as counselling and advice to individual students. Furthermore, an important goal of RAP is to make school experiences more relevant to less academically inclined students, thereby reducing the incidence of program attrition and improving those students' future position in the labour market. Therefore, policy makers, administrators, teachers, and parents should be interested in learning whether RAP effectively reaches this specific target group and whether participation in RAP indeed has the potential to contribute to students' educational attainment.

In addition to the study's implications for educational policy, an important contribution of my dissertation will be to fill a theoretical gap in the literature on school-work transitions. The literature typically takes either a human capital or rational choice approach, both of which assume a straightforward relationship between education, cost-benefit calculations, and labour market outcomes, or a structural approach, which over-emphasizes the capacity of social and institutional structures to reinforce inequality.

Within the more economist, rational choice tradition, inequality is explained as the result of individuals' informed choice. Participation in, for instance, youth apprenticeship programs, or enrolment at university, is seen to be based on careful cost-benefit calculation, in which family income, social expectations, and labour market opportunity structures (including credential requirements) are weighed against the cost and likelihood of success of participating in a specific program (Boudon 1974; Goldthorpe 1996). Interview and focus group data will be used in this dissertation to see whether such calculations are indeed the basis of young people's dispositions toward post-high school destinations.

Historically, the sociological school-work transitions literature has been characterized by a structural approach, which investigates relationships between variables such as socio-economic background, gender or ethnicity, and school-work transition outcomes. Most prominent in this tradition are social stratification and status attainment theories. For instance, recent stratification research has found that the influence of class-based structural variables has persisted over time (Andres et al. 1999; Friebel et al. 2000) and that socio-economic status (SES) is still the strongest determinant of educational attainment (Davies 1999).[1] Furthermore, gender and race have been found to circumscribe both educational and occupational aspirations and attainment (Alba et al. 1994; Geller 1996). Somewhat similarly, status attainment models (Blau and Duncan 1967; Duncan and Hodge 1963; Jencks, Crouse and Mueser 1983; Looker and Pineo 1983) have found evidence that parents' (usually fathers') educational and occupational attainment have a significant influence on the educational attainment, first job, and further occupational life course of their children. In this study, I gathered both quantitative data (e.g., on parents' educational and occupational attainment) and qualitative data (on how students see their parents as role models or as influences on their dispositions) that address these theoretical and empirical findings.

---

[1] The concepts of class and socio-economic status (SES) are used interchangeably throughout this study. Socio-economic status represents a more clearly defined empirical category (including measures of education and occupational attainment and income), and I use it when referring to the importance of these measures. However, I also use the various concepts of class in order to more explicitly address issues concerning the reproduction of social status.

These structural approaches have been criticized for overemphasizing the capacity of institutional structures to reinforce social inequality. Critics have argued that structural explanations lack insight into the actual decision making of individuals and disregard difficult-to-measure variables, such as specific institutional structures (both in education and the labour market) or high school curriculum. In response, researchers have begun to explore the intricate interrelationships between individual choice, or agency, and social context, or structure. They have either tried to explain how individuals themselves are actively implicated in the reproduction of inequality or why at least some young people manage to escape the shackles of social origin. Willis's influential study *Learning to Labour* (1977) is the most famous explanation of individuals' own part in reproducing their social status. As the basis for resistance theory, Willis's work has inspired similar research in many countries, including Canada (Gaskell 1985; Tanner 1990). Although little evidence was found to support Willis's claims (see Davies 1994, 1995), these studies highlighted the need to expand the analysis of social reproduction beyond exclusive consideration of either structure or agency. Working within the more recent theoretical notions of *risk society* (Beck 1986, 1992) and *late modernity* (Giddens 1990), researchers have developed concepts of agency and *individualization* that assume a continued influence of structural factors such as class, gender and race, although at a much less prominent and deterministic level than in much of the social stratification and status attainment literature (Evans 2002; Roberts, Clark, and Wallace 1994; Rudd and Evans 1998). Addressing such issues of resistance, the interviews and focus groups in my study gave participants a chance to talk about their relationships with both teachers and curriculum, and to what extent, for instance, participation in a youth apprenticeship was an expression of working-class resistance to the middle-class values of mobility through higher education. Individuals' narratives were further deconstructed to see whether accounts of independent decision making showed evidence of a structurally circumscribed process of individualization.

Ultimately, this study is theoretically grounded in an understanding of individual agency and structural constraints not as exclusive concepts, but as interdependent and implicated in one another. Both Bourdieu's *theory of practice* (Andres Bellamy 1993; Bourdieu 1977, Bourdieu 1990; Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992) and Giddens' *structuration theory* (Giddens 1984) provide useful conceptual tools to study the complicated interaction between individual choice and social context that frames school-work transitions. Bourdieu's concepts of *habitus*, *field* and *cultural capital* provided a rich theoretical and empirical framework that fit with the ontological and epistemological assumptions of my study. Ontologically, my research was guided by a moderately constructivist realism, which meant that I assumed that individuals construct a version of reality, but that there is also an objective reality existing outside individuals. Epistemologically, I worked within a postpositivist, realist framework, analyzing participants' narratives as constructed notions of agency, while still being able to situate this constructed agency in an objective reality (Layder 1993). This approach gave voice to the individually experienced realities of participants, but analyzed them in relation to structural factors (such as class and gender).

This study begins with the assumption that a young person's socio-economic background, conceptualized as parents' educational and occupational attainment, family income, and various measures of cultural capital, has a very strong, early influence on school placement. Breaking through more structuralist notions that see life course chances determined by an individual's socio-economic background and other institutional and structural factors, I propose a more nuanced approach that investigates the influence of an individual's social environment (e.g., parents, peers, teachers and other potential role models) and institutional environment (e.g., education system, labour market structures, economic situation), as well as young people's own perception and understanding of these contexts, on the active formation of their dispositions toward certain transition paths.

Methodologically, my study applied a multi-method approach that yielded both quantitative and qualitative data. Empirically and theoretically, the focus was on the qualitative data gathered through individual interviews and focus groups with a total of 105 participants in both Edmonton and Bremen. These data provided a rich source for an analysis of young people's own perceptions regarding the relationship between structure and agency in their transitions or transition plans upon completion of secondary education. In addition, all but two participants completed a questionnaire at the end of the interviews and focus groups. This instrument collected data regarding various aspects of participants' SES. It also included a number of items that were addressed in the interview and focus groups, thus allowing both further quantification and reliability checks for some of the qualitative findings.

The still contested nature of a new program like Alberta's RAP makes it an ideal case for the study of the relationship between social, cultural, and institutional factors and individual choice that influence young people's decisions to enter different educational or career paths after high school. Little is currently known about the factors that create barriers to participation in programs like RAP and how young people at the point of transition from high school account for their career plans. My research questions ask what high school students consider to be important influences during their transition processes, and whether participation in a youth apprenticeship is the result of a young person's active and reflexive negotiation with his or her environment. Are young people actively entering youth apprenticeships because they see in them an alternative to post-secondary education as well as unskilled labour? Are the same young people aware of the debates surrounding the shortages in skilled trades and similar occupations? Or do young people participate, as the opponents of youth apprenticeships argue, because they were already streamed into vocational high school programs or because their socio-economic background effectively precludes them from entering university or community college? In addition to these core questions about structure and agency, and social reproduction of inequality, this study also investigates how youth apprentices' early integration into adult roles affects their lifestyles, attitudes and future career plans.

To address these questions, I begin with an analysis of the structural, cultural, and institutional features that frame participation in academic high school education and apprenticeship training in Canada and Germany. Chapter 2 provides an overview of the policy debates that led to the introduction of RAP in Alberta. It also discusses how RAP is organized and integrated into the secondary school curriculum, and describes the organization and structure of Germany's dual system and its integration into the education system and labour market. Drawing on secondary statistical data, Chapter 2 also provides a first glimpse of the conflicting accounts of whether youth apprenticeships facilitate successful transitions from secondary education or contribute to social reproduction and structural inequality.

After an overview of the relevant empirical and theoretical literature in Chapter 3 and an outline of methodology and data collection strategies in Chapter 4, Chapter 5 uses the quantitative data gathered in my survey to profile the 105 participants and to see whether they conform to the patterns in the aggregate data (Chapter 2). Following this discussion of quantitative findings, Chapter 6 presents participants' own accounts of their transitions and dispositions. The subsequent analysis chapters deconstruct these narratives, seeking influences of institutional contexts (Chapter 7) and social environments (Chapter 8). The cross-national comparison in Chapter 7 focuses on the degree to which education systems and labour markets in Canada and Germany shape school-work transitions through their different emphasis on transparency and flexibility, and thus presents more of a macro analysis. In contrast, Chapter 8 analyzes the influence of significant others like parents, siblings, peers and teachers on young people's development of career dispositions. Both these chapters, as well as the more descriptive earlier Chapters 5 and 6, set the groundwork for the more complex theoretical analysis in Chapters 9 and 10. Drawing heavily on Bourdieu's concepts of habitus and cultural capital, Chapter 9 analyzes and interprets both the quantitative and qualitative data for evidence of social and cultural reproduction. Chapter 10 draws on this analysis to identify the individual strategies that young people use to assert agency and control over their school-work transitions, even in the face of often structurally reproduced outcomes.

In his introduction to *Learning to Labour*, Willis (1977) writes that

> The difficult thing to explain about how middle class kids get middle class jobs is why others let them. The difficult thing to explain about how working-class kids get working-class jobs is why they let themselves. (ibid., 1)

He concludes that his "lads" are actively involved in reproducing their own social disadvantage by embracing working-class identities and resisting the dominant middle class school culture. In contrast to this pessimistic notion of *Learning to Labour*, I more optimistically propose that most youth apprentices in my study, in both countries, were indeed *Choosing to Labour*.

Chapter 2

Setting the Scene: The Policy and Institutional Background

In this chapter, I will briefly introduce the economic and educational debates that formed the policy background for the introduction of RAP in Alberta. Given the comparative purpose of this dissertation, and the role the German apprenticeship system (dual system) plays as a model for the development of RAP, I will also include a brief overview of the main characteristics of apprenticeship training in Germany. I will then outline the main critiques of youth apprenticeship programs.

The School-Work Transitions Debate

The school-work transition experiences of young people in Western industrialized societies have changed considerably over the last two decades. In Canada, high levels of youth unemployment are being recognized as structural rather than cyclical problems, as youth unemployment rates remain significantly higher than adult unemployment rates (Betcherman and Leckie 1997; Statistics Canada 2001). The recession in the early '90s had a particularly severe impact on youth employment without any significant recovery trends throughout most of that decade (Krahn 1996). Table 1 indicates that young people aged 15-24 are faced with unemployment rates twice as high as those for adults 25 years and older.

Labour market outcomes are particularly unstable, both in terms of employment security and income, for those young people not destined for college or university.

Table 1. Unemployment Rates in Canada by Age and Gender, 2000

Age	Both Sexes	Male	Female
All Ages (15+)	6.8%	6.9%	6.7%
Youth (15-24)	12.6%	13.9%	11.9%
Adults (25+)	5.7%	5.6%	5.7%

Source: Statistics Canada, Labour Force Historical Review 2000 (2001)

A recent report on the transition from initial education to working life by Human Resources Development Canada (1998) summarizes the transition experiences of Canadian youth as more challenging, varied and open-ended than in the past. Transition processes are seen to be influenced by

> "the high rate of youth unemployment, the changing nature of the Canadian economy and job market, rising expectations of young people for postsecondary education, the concern for adolescents at risk of leaving school without the necessary skills, and the degree to which formal educational programs at the secondary and postsecondary levels are adequately preparing young people for the world of work in the 21st century" (ibid., 1).

Regardless of educational achievement, it is argued that young people about to enter work not only have to struggle with fewer employment opportunities, but also face a youth labour market that is characterized by part-time, temporary, contract and other forms of non-standard work (Lowe and Krahn 1999), as well as increasing levels of underemployment (Livingstone 1999). Either explicitly or implicitly, most of the school-work transitions literature agrees that transition processes have become more complex and less predictable. Whereas youth 20 years ago could rely on more stable patterns of transition, youth today are dealing with higher degrees of risk, uncertainty, and a need for more individualized decision-making (Furlong and Cartmel 1997).

Numerous initiatives have been introduced to address these problems, including stay-in-school campaigns, co-operative education and internship programs, and youth apprenticeships, like Alberta's RAP. Proponents of youth apprenticeships argue that participation opens possibilities to more rewarding careers, provides satisfying career alternatives, and generally improves a young person's range of choices and career options (Careers: The Next Generation 1998). Apprenticeship training is considered a solution to a Catch-22 situation faced by many young people—getting the work experience which is needed to gain entry to stable jobs. It allows young people to gain such work experience while at the same time fulfilling the requirements needed to graduate from high school. By linking the workplace and the classroom, youth apprenticeship programs hope to ease young people's transition to the workplace, encourage high school completion by increasing the relevancy of classroom learning, help young people develop skills for employability and self-employment, and provide greater opportunities for youth to experience a variety of career options (Careers: The Next Generation 1999). I will provide a short description of a few Canadian youth apprenticeship programs below, but will first discuss the other labour market problem that has made youth apprenticeships such attractive programs to policy makers, namely, the lack of skilled trades workers.

The Lack-of-Skilled-Workers Debate

While school-work transitions for young people have become increasingly difficult, we continue to hear concerns about shortages of skilled workers in the trades (e.g., Alberta Apprenticeship and Industry Training Board 1996; Statistics Canada 2003). Policy-makers, employers, and the media regularly portray the long-term prospects for the Canadian economy as crippled by a demand for skilled labour that far outpaces supply (e.g., Alberta Chamber of Resources and Construction Owners of Alberta 1990; Bertin 2000). "Trades scrambling as labour shortage looms," states a recent front page headline in the *Edmonton Journal* (Finlayson 2003).

One response from industry groups to projected skills shortages has been to extend their reach into the education system and to become more involved in the development of curriculum (at least vocational curriculum). For example, the introduction of RAP in Alberta is the result of years of pressure from industry and educational reformers to bring at least some aspects of the secondary curriculum more in line with industry needs (Lehmann and Taylor 2003). Policy discussions throughout the 1990s emphasised the importance of work education to economic prosperity in Alberta (Alberta Education 1991, 1994, 1996). The idea of matching students better to occupational demand was perceived as a win-win situation for young people and employers. Youth apprenticeship programs represent the "deepest" form of partnership between schools and employers, as youth apprentices receive high school credit for the time spent working with their employer (Taylor and Lehmann 2002).

Youth Apprenticeship Programs across Canada

Across Canada, the federal government, most of the provinces and territories, as well as schools and the private sector have been involved in developing special programs to assist young people making the transition into the workforce (Lehmann 2000). Human Resources Development Canada (HRDC) has funded initiatives such as Youth Internship Canada, Youth Services Canada and the Youth Information Initiative. High schools offer career, technology, and vocational programs and increasingly forge partnerships with the local business community. Co-operative education, internship, and youth apprenticeship programs have received growing attention as alternative forms of improving school-work transitions. Youth apprenticeship programs are designed to provide opportunities for high school students to begin training in a skilled trade while at the same time completing high school. There are a number of youth apprenticeship programs in place in various provinces. Table 2 provides an overview and brief description of these programs, while the following section will focus on some of the older or more unique programs.

Participating students in the Ontario Youth Apprenticeship Program (OYAP) earn credits towards an Ontario Secondary School Diploma (OSSD), while hours worked on the job are applied to their journeyperson certification. To be eligible, students must be at least 16 years of age and must have completed Grade 10. While working as youth apprentices, students have to keep up their academic record as well as satisfactory workplace performance. Participants are paid a percentage of a journeyperson's wage for the time they spend on the job and can return to their regular school program within the first year if they find that they are not suited to a career in the chosen trade (Marquardt 1998).

Table 2. Selected Youth Apprenticeship Programs, Canada, Provinces

Province	Program	Type of Program	Occupations
British Columbia	Secondary School Apprenticeship Program (SSA)	credit toward journeyperson certification in traditional trades min. age 15	construction, mechanics, baker, hairdresser, etc.
Alberta	Registered Apprenticeship Program (RAP)	credit toward journeyperson certification in traditional trades Grade 10 or 11	construction, mechanics, baker, hairdresser, etc.
Northwest Territories	Schools North Apprenticeship Program (SNAP)	credit toward journeyperson certification in traditional trades min. age 16	construction, mechanics, baker, hairdresser, etc.
Manitoba	Senior Years Apprenticeship Option (SYAO)	credit toward journeyperson certification in traditional trades min. age 16, Grade 11	construction, mechanics, baker, hairdresser, etc.
Ontario	Ontario Youth Apprenticeship Program (OYAP)	credit toward journeyperson certification in traditional trades min. age 16, completed Grade 10	construction, mechanics, baker, hairdresser, etc.
New Brunswick	New Brunswick Youth Apprenticeship Program (YAP)	careers that have traditionally been outside the realm of apprenticeship programs; direct link to the province's post-secondary institutions – participants are guaranteed a community college seat in a related field and preferred status at the University of New Brunswick	management (e.g., office, HR, hotel), marine biology
Nova Scotia	Nova Scotia School-to-Work Transition Project (NSSWT)	not an apprenticeship program per se; objective: facilitate later transition and increased career awareness offered to students in Grades 11 and 12;	"assistant" positions (assisting veterinarians, lawyers, teachers, and mechanics).

The *New Brunswick Youth Apprenticeship Program* (YAP) permits high school students in Grade 10, after participation in career development and career exploration activities, to enrol concurrently in a secondary school program leading to a high school diploma and to become involved in career preparation in their chosen occupational area. While this program is less linked to traditional trades training and does not automatically grant credit toward journeyperson certification, it guarantees participants a community college seat in a related field and preferred status at the University of New Brunswick.

In 1994, British Columbia introduced the *Secondary School Apprenticeship* program in which participating students are employees of a firm and registered as apprentices while completing high school. One of the major aims of this program was to introduce young women to a range of occupations, although with only limited success so far (Gallagher et al. 1997).

A brief mention should be made of the Québec vocational education system, even though a formal high school-based apprenticeship does not exist in this province. Vocational education in Québec offers three different programs, all of which lead to certification that is recognized in the labour market: the Diploma of Vocational Studies (DVS), the Attestation of Vocational Specialization (AVS) and the Vocational Education Certificate (VEC). Unlike other provinces in which adult vocational education is part of the post-secondary education system, basic vocational education in Québec is offered at the secondary level, and therefore open to young people and adults (Ministère de l'Éducation 2001). In fact, of the 87,000 students enrolled in vocational education in

1996-97, 62,000 were over the age of 20.[2] Apprenticeship training is part of this system and is operated jointly by Emploi-Québec and the Ministère de l'Éducation.

Although not a youth apprenticeship or co-operative transition program per se, the *Nova Scotia School-to-Work Transition* (*NSSWT*) project is one initiative which has been thoroughly evaluated (Thiessen and Looker 1999). Like many of the youth apprenticeship initiatives described in this section, this program was offered to students in Grades 11 and 12 and involved an in-school component and a work experience component. The objectives of the program were to provide generic and specific skills that would increase students' likelihood of making a successful transition to a rewarding career and to gain realistic expectations about their future jobs while at the same time improving partnerships between schools and employers. Students were placed in "assistant" type positions (e.g., assisting veterinarians, lawyers, teachers, and mechanics). These placements gave students access to a much wider range of occupations than those covered by traditional apprenticed trades.

The outcomes of this project proved to be mixed, at best. While participating students generally evaluated their experience positively and as having better prepared them for their subsequent transitions, their high school performance eventually fell behind that of other students (ibid.). As the program's design tried to encourage students from varied backgrounds to enter the program, this difference in school performance cannot be entirely attributed to self-selection. The program also fell short of establishing sufficiently close relationships between schools and the local business community to truly affect long-lasting structural changes. There was also some concern expressed about a lack of integration between the development of strictly workplace-related skills and skills required to succeed in post-secondary education (ibid., 264-268). Still, the program was considered to be useful in that it made high school experiences more relevant to participants. It also encouraged students to consider a variety of post-secondary pathways, provided participants with necessary work experience in their chosen career fields, and presented reflective learning opportunities that allowed participants to identify their strengths and weaknesses in both workplace and school (ibid., 262-264).

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[2] This information regarding enrollment in vocational education in Québec was taken from the following website, accessed on July 14, 2003: http://www.meq.gouv.qc.ca/rens/brochu/anglais/voc_tech.htm

The Alberta Registered Apprenticeship Program (RAP)

Compared to other provinces' vocational reform initiatives, Alberta probably has been the most persistent and successful in its pursuit of linking schools and industry in general, and in expanding its youth apprenticeship program in particular. This may be partly explained by Alberta's generally industry-friendly policy environment (Taylor 2001), but also by the fact that Alberta already has higher than average adult participation in apprenticeship training (Alberta Apprenticeship and Industry Training Board 2002) and a corresponding infrastructure on which to build its youth apprenticeship program. While the province has a long history of vocational education policy, the introduction of RAP can be traced to a number of reforms ranging from the mid '80s to the early '90s. These reforms were mostly prompted by concerns about projected labour shortages in certain occupational areas (e.g., the trades) and by a perception that vocational education needed to become more closely linked with the "real world" of work. For instance, a *Review of Secondary Programs* in 1984 recommended that schools, business/industry, and organized labour work in partnership to design high-quality work experience programs and communicate the knowledge, skills, and abilities expected of graduates (Alberta Education 1984). Many of these recommendations eventually led to significant changes in vocational education programs, realized as part of the 1988 *Practical Arts Review*. Vocational high school courses, then known as practical arts, became the Career and Technology Studies (CTS) curriculum, which has adopted a modular approach by organizing courses around occupational strands. Each of 22 current strands includes a set of one-credit courses related to selected industry sectors, including goods-producing industries (e.g., agriculture, manufacturing, and construction) and service-producing industries (e.g., business, health, and finance).

While the CTS curriculum was heavily influenced by concerns regarding young people's perceived absence of employability skills,[3] the introduction of RAP in 1991 addressed a much more narrowly defined skills problem—namely shortages of skilled workers in the trades (Taylor and Lehmann 2002). As a school-work transitions program, RAP was more specifically targeted at the middle-majority of students—those neither pre-destined for higher post-secondary education nor at risk of dropping out or failing high school. However, there are some conflicting opinions as to whether RAP should be considered a stay-at-school program, and whether the real target group should be at-risk students who would benefit from a more practice-oriented, applied alternative to the academic curriculum (personal communication with Alberta Learning representative [Anthony Lovell], March 22, 2001).

RAP is designed to allow full-time high school students to begin an apprenticeship as early as Grade 11, earning credit toward a high school diploma and a journeyperson certification at the same time. RAP apprentices are registered as proper apprentices with the Alberta Apprenticeship and Industry Training Board, but also maintain full-time student status at their high school.

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[3] For a definition of employability skills in the Canadian context, see McLaughlin (1992). For a discussion of high school students acquisition of employability skills, see Krahn, Lowe and Lehmann (2002).

RAP students are fully integrated into Alberta's adult apprenticeship system,[4] except for their reduced hours in the workplace. In Alberta's adult apprenticeship system, apprentices spend about 80 percent of their training on the job, and 20 percent at a college or technical institute for the theoretical component of their program. Theoretical training is usually done in one block per year, during which time apprentices collect Employment Insurance, rather than a salary from their employer. The system itself is largely industry-driven. The Alberta Apprenticeship and Industry Training Board co-ordinates training content and setting of standards in co-operation with a network of local and provincial committees. Duration of apprenticeship training varies between two to four years, depending on occupation. Graduation from the system depends on completion of a required number of hours in the workplace, a required set of courses at colleges or technical institutes, and the passing of final examinations.

RAP apprentices receive one credit toward high school graduation for each specified number of hours worked. The program is designed such that a RAP student's worked hours essentially will replace all course options necessary for high school graduation, leaving him or her with only the required English, math, social studies and science courses. The program depends upon flexible arrangements between schools, employers, and students to work out a mutually agreeable schedule. Depending on workplace demands, RAP apprentices may work and go to school at the same time. Alternatively, they may spend one semester exclusively at school, taking all their required courses, and the following semester exclusively at work, earning credit for their worked hours. RAP students who take the latter block release therefore need to take all four core courses in the same term. Generally, RAP students in one of the nine-to-five trades (e.g., construction or automobile mechanics) tend to work on block release, as their work schedules overlap with the school schedule. Those in occupations like hairdressing or in the hospitality industry (e.g., chefs) can build their hours around more flexible work schedules and often spend the morning at school and afternoons, evenings or weekends at work.

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[4] I am referring to Alberta's apprenticeship system as an "adult" apprenticeship system, because most apprentices in Alberta enter their apprenticeship after numerous years in the workforce, usually in casual labour without any post-secondary credentials. On average, Alberta apprentices do not start their apprenticeships until they are in their mid-20s (Alberta Apprenticeship and Industry Training Board 1996). In contrast, apprentices in Germany's dual system start their apprenticeships immediately after completing their schooling, at an average age of around 17 (Heidenreich 1998, 327).

Upon high school graduation, RAP students have the option of continuing their apprenticeship training. Generally, they will have completed the equivalent of a first year apprentice's work hours and receive advanced standing once they take up their apprenticeship training full-time. However, graduation from high school has been made a prerequisite in order to carry over worked hours into the post-high school remainder of the apprenticeship program. In other words, if a RAP student drops out of high school or fails to graduate, the Alberta Apprenticeship and Industry Training Board voids his or her accumulated work hours. This policy is considered an essential element of RAP's stay-at-school purpose, at once attracting non-academic students to a more experiential alternative to completing high school, and providing an incentive for sticking with the program.[5]

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[5] Alberta Learning in conjunction with the Alberta Apprenticeship and Industry Training Board distributes informational material about RAP across schools (one of the leaflets targeting students, for instance, is

It is difficult to measure the direct impact of a program like RAP on high school completion, and to the best of my knowledge, no such evaluation has been completed. However, a 2001 satisfaction study commissioned by Alberta Learning and the Alberta Apprenticeship and Industry Training Board found that a majority of surveyed RAP participants felt that their participation had provided an incentive to stay and do well in school. The same survey also found that an even bigger majority of RAP apprentices had never actually dropped out or considered dropping out of high school (HarGroup Management Consultants Inc. 2001).

Despite significant growth in enrolment since the first five students started in RAP in 1991, the 980 enrolled RAP apprentices at the end of 2001 (Alberta Apprenticeship and Industry Training Board 2002) still comprise less than one percent of all high school students in the province. High school students are eligible to enter any of the recognized trades in Alberta, provided that an employer is willing to take them on as apprentices. The five most popular trades occupations in 2000 were welder, automotive service technician, heavy equipment technician, electrician, and hairstylist (ibid.). The high enrolment in welding, heavy equipment mechanics, and carpentry is not surprising, given the prominence of the oil and gas industry in Alberta, and the associated boom in construction. Automotive technician is also a perennial favourite among young men. More surprising, however, is the high level of enrolment in hairstyling, which indicates an increased interest of young women in RAP. Unfortunately, Alberta Learning does not publish official data indicating gender of RAP participants, but general apprenticeship statistics (Statistics Canada 1999) indicate that, despite the high levels of female

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entitled "Earn while you learn!") and maintains a Web site outlining how RAP works and its advantages to both students and employers (www.tradesecrets.org).

participation in RAP as hairstylists, women have made very few inroads into the traditional male trades that form the backbone of the apprenticeship system, and that little to nothing is being done to address this gender imbalance (Lehmann and Taylor 2003).[6]

Before delving further into the possibilities and pitfalls of youth apprenticeships, I want to take a short detour to Germany and provide a brief description of the general secondary education system and the apprenticeship system (also known as the dual system). Germany's dual system is often paraded as the role model for successful school-work transition programs (Lehmann 2000). Most North American youth apprenticeship systems have been influenced by it, and a great number of vocational education bureaucrats have been eager visitors to German workplaces and vocational schools.

Germany's Dual System as a Model

Germany's dual system is often cited as a successful labour market model allowing young people to avoid periods of labour market floundering (perceived as characteristic of North American school-work transition processes) and reducing youth unemployment rates. The dual system also has been credited with making Germany into a leading manufacturing economy on the strength of its highly skilled labour force. Comparing youth unemployment rates, Germany certainly seems to have an edge over Canada, particularly for the 15 to 19 year age group, which, for the Canadian youth population, includes those who entered the labour market directly from high school without further post-secondary education or training (see Table 3). In Germany, labour force participation in this age group is dominated by young people in the apprenticeship system.

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[6] Similarly, young men are not entering hairdressing.

Table 3. Youth Unemployment Rates in Canada and Germany by Age Group; 1998

Age	Canada	Germany
15-19 years	20%	7.6%
20-24 years	12.6%	9.9%

Source: OECD, Education at a Glance (2000)

The two features that set the German educational system apart from most other Western industrialized countries are the co-existence of three types of secondary schools and the importance of the dual system of vocational training. Both features are central to understanding the specific conditions that frame the social context for school-work transitions in Germany and for explaining young people's choice of alternative career and educational paths. As the tripartite school system is generally recognized as an important structural determinant of participation in the dual system (Baumert et al. 1994), I will begin my description of the dual system with an overview of the secondary education in Germany (see Appendix A for a diagram of the basic structure of education in Germany).

Secondary Education in Germany

The provision of education in Germany is in the domain of the individual federal states (*Länder*), thus paralleling the provincial responsibility for education in Canada. The primary reason for making education a responsibility of the *Länder* was to avoid a centralization of the educational system as was experienced during the Nazi era from

1933 to 1945 (Führ 1989). One of the most significant characteristics of the West German educational system is its very rigorous streaming at an early stage of a child's schooling. Aptitude tests as well as parental decision at the end of Grade 4 (when the student is 10 or 11 years old) determine where a student is placed in Germany's three secondary education streams.[7] In the "lowest" stream, the secondary modern school (*Hauptschule*) has traditionally had the task of preparing students for entry into apprenticeships in crafts and skilled trades. In the "middle" stream, the intermediate secondary school (*Realschule*) has led to apprenticeships in commerce. The "higher" stream high school (*Gymnasium*) was traditionally reserved for Germany's elite and prepared a small minority for university entrance. [8]

Hauptschule (Secondary Modern School)

Hauptschule covers Grades 5 to 9 and its main objectives are to integrate students into the political, social, and cultural life of society, and, furthermore, to prepare them for a working life. This stream is very clearly a preparation for apprenticeships in mostly blue collar, retail sales, and lower-level clerical positions. Emphasis, especially in the final years of the *Hauptschule*, is placed on providing information and knowledge about the world of work and occupations in order to facilitate students' career choices.

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[7] Parents can "override" what aptitude tests suggest and teachers recommend. Students can be placed in one of the higher school types (on probation), even though their test results would suggest otherwise. Similarly, parents can decide to place their child in one of the lower school types, although his or her elementary school performance would warrant attendance at a higher level. Although money is not an immediate issue in secondary school placement (there is no tuition in any of the schools), some parents might be concerned about the long-term financial implications of their child attending school until Grade 13 (*Gymnasium*), as opposed to entering an apprenticeship and earning an income after Grade 9 (*Hauptschule*).

[8] In some of the German *Länder*, Grades 5 and 6 constitute a so-called *orientation level,* generally offered at one of the rare comprehensive schools, with the purpose of making transferability between the streams easier (Führ, 1989). This is to give individual students an idea about their abilities and interests and to help determine which school type would be most appropriate. Orientation levels and quasi-comprehensive school types have typically only been introduced in the less conservative *Länder*, which has made any debate about their success or failure also an ideological and political one. These controversies have flared up recently with Germany's rather poor results in the recent PISA (*Programme for International Student Assessment*) study, which also revealed differences within Germany (i.e., between the different *Länder).*

The term *Hauptschule* was introduced in 1964 as part of an ambitious program to transform the upper level of what was known as the *Volksschule.*[9] The goal set for the *Hauptschule* was to offer an initiation into scientific thinking and a more extensive preparation for employment. The new curriculum included a compulsory foreign language (English), vocational orientation, and more demanding courses in natural sciences and mathematics (Max Planck Institute for Human Development and Education 1983). However, these efforts to make education at the *Hauptschule* level more attractive collided, particularly in the cities, with the growing enrolment in the *Realschule* and *Gymnasium* (discussed below). The *Hauptschule* has increasingly become the "problem child" of the educational system, a trend which has been fuelled by educational reforms in the last several decades which introduced possibilities for higher education to children of lower- and middle-class families. The increasing number of *Realschule* and *Gymnasium* graduates competing for apprenticeship positions has also created a displacement problem, raising the entrance requirements to many apprenticeships that were usually easily accessible to *Hauptschule* students. This further decreased the attractiveness of the *Hauptschule* and has had devastating effects on students' motivation as they see their chances for gaining high-quality apprenticeship positions in the dual system ever more diminished.

Educational policy-makers have become concerned about the rapidly decreasing attractiveness of the *Hauptschule*. In many urban areas, *Hauptschulen* have become

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[9] *Volksschulen* covered Grades 1 to 8 and, especially in small villages, were often organized in a way that students from different grades were taught at the same time in the same room. Such conditions were seen as severe obstacles to equality between rural and urban educational conditions.

"remainder schools" for the children of foreign workers, immigrants, and members of marginal groups (Baumert et al. 1994). The social and educational devaluation of the *Hauptschule* manifests itself above all in the school climate, characterized by high rates of absenteeism and disciplinary problems. The discrepancy between what was intended and what has become reality is quite evident in the name *Hauptschule* itself, which translates into "main school." Despite its name, the *Hauptschule* no longer serves the broad masses or the average student, but draws its students from a class-specific stratum that has become increasingly narrow. Children of unskilled labourers who themselves have not had the opportunity to take advantage of the educational system and children of foreign workers now make up an increasing percentage of the *Hauptschule's* students. Hand in hand with this development goes the dwindling prestige of the *Hauptschule* certificate and the chance for *Hauptschule* graduates to enter high-quality apprenticeships.

Realschule (Intermediate School)

Realschule covers Grades 5 to 10 and is neither biased towards preparing a student for entering university (as is the *Gymnasium*) nor towards employment, although a great number of graduates will seek apprenticeships in skilled trades and white collar jobs in commerce and the service industry. It differs from the *Hauptschule* in offering a greater range of subjects and differs from the *Gymnasium* in preparing students for more practical functions in middle-level positions that demand ever increasing technical, industrial and social responsibilities. The *Realschule* has become increasingly attractive to students because it offers access to middle-level positions in industry and commerce as well as the option of transferring to the *Gymnasium* upon completion of Grade 10.

According to the Max Planck Institute for Human Development and Education (1983, 188), the relatively large expansion of the *Realschule* is due to two social forces:

> the ambition of certain groups in the lower social strata to climb to a higher rung of the social ladder, and the desire of groups in the lower middle stratum to maintain their social status. In general, growing prosperity increased the interest and the participation of these groups in education, the increase benefiting the *Realschule* more than the *Gymnasium*, which is culturally and in its social character more alien to the members of these groups than the former type of school.

The shift from the manufacturing to the service sector has further increased the attractiveness of the *Realschule,* as its certificates allow young people to enter the middle echelons of public administration and of management in the private sector. Displacement competition is another factor contributing to the large number of young people enrolled in the *Realschule* rather than the *Hauptschule* (Max Planck Institute for Human Development and Education 1983; Schober 1984). Lempert (1995) argues that students who would have been "good *Hauptschule* students" a few decades ago are now at least enrolled in the *Realschule.* As far as apprenticeship participation is concerned, this probably makes the *Realschule* a more important type of secondary school than the *Hauptschule.*

Gymnasium (Grammar School)

Gymnasium covers Grades 5 to 13 and its objective has traditionally been to provide the qualifications to enter university. Up to the mid-'60s, the *Gymnasium* was a highly selective school. In 1965, only about 15 percent of all 13 year-olds attended the *Gymnasium,* and only about 8 percent of the appropriate age group obtained the *Abitur* (*Gymnasium* graduation diploma, allowing university access) (Max Planck Institute for

Human Development and Education 1983). The *Gymnasium* traditionally put children of working-class families and those from rural areas, as well as young women, at a disadvantage. In 1965, only 10 percent of the students in Grade 10 of the *Gymnasium* came from working-class families, while 25 percent were the children of civil servants. At the same time, workers made up 55 percent of all employed males whereas civil servants only made up 7 percent. High attrition rates for working-class students throughout the nine years of Gymnasium reduced their already small relative enrolment even further by the time the final grade (Grade 13) was reached (ibid.). However, educational reforms have significantly changed the *Gymnasium* from an elitist school for the few to an institution attended by a much greater percentage of students.

Table 4: School Leavers, by Type of Qualification, Germany, 1960-1999*

	No Qualification (%)	Hauptschule (%)	Realschule (%)	Gymnasium (Abitur) (%)
1960	132,000 (20%)	354,600 (53.7%)	117,200 (17.7%)	56,700 (8.6%)
1980	147,100 (12.4%)	391,400 (33.1%)	422,200 (35.7%)	221,700 (18.8%)
1999*	118,600 (10.4%)	244,300 (21.4%)	440,000 (38.5%)	339,900 (29.7%)

* Data for 1960-1990: Federal Republic of Germany only; 1999: United Germany
Source: Bundesministerium für Bildung und Forschung, Grund- und Strukturdaten 2000/2001 (2001)

The relative decline of the *Hauptschule* and the relative increase of participation in higher secondary education (see Table 4) have led to two major developments.

Universities have to some degree lost their elitist status and are now forced to cope with problems of overcrowding. At the same time, a growing number of *Gymnasium* graduates now decide to enter an apprenticeship rather than go to university, or to complete an apprenticeship as a stepping stone before entering university or a polytechnic institution in more practical subjects such as engineering or business administration. This shows the continuing attractiveness of the apprenticeship system but also poses some problems for students graduating from the other two school types, as entry requirements for many apprenticeship positions are being raised.

Description of the Dual System

While the dual system of vocational training in Germany can be traced back to the guilds and trades of the middle ages, the term "dual system" is relatively new (Greinert 1994a). It was first coined in 1964 by the German Commission for Education in its report on vocational training and education (*Gutachten über das berufliche Ausbildungs- und Schulwesen*) (Münch 1995). Duality in Germany's apprenticeship system is defined by the two different locations in which it takes place: the firm (workplace) and vocational schools.

Training in a firm is characterized by its close link between working and learning. It is argued that vocational training in companies offers an advantage over school-based training, as vocational schools or colleges are rarely in a position to continuously update their machines and equipment. Furthermore, apprentices are said to learn how to work economically and responsibly, to respect and work with others, and to handle customers and suppliers. It is also argued that trainers in companies are better able to integrate new technical demands into training, and that graduates from an apprenticeship program can be productive immediately after completing their training (Bundesministerium für Bildung und Wissenschaft 1994). While apprenticeship training in Alberta or Canada is largely confined to traditional trades occupations—49 in Alberta, the German dual system covers over 300 occupations, ranging from traditional trades to the types of modern service and administrative occupations that are usually part of the community college system in Canada (Bundesministerium für Bildung und Forschung 2000).

Vocational schooling in the dual system is offered on a part-time basis. Training capacities are determined by the companies, not by vocational schools. Training directives developed for in-company training largely pre-define the curriculum at vocational schools and, in the eyes of apprentices and employers alike, the company has a higher priority than the vocational school (Koch and Reuling 1994). Apprentices attend vocational school one to two days a week or on a block release for a longer period of time. There is no tuition fee and apprentices continue to receive income from their company while attending vocational school, even on a block release (Münch 1995, 51).

In contrast to the loosely structured framework that guides apprenticeships in Canada and the belief in liberal ideals which limits Canadian governments' direct influence on labour markets, the German dual system is guided by a rather complex competence and responsibility structure.[10] Employers decide whether to train at all, how many training places to offer, which applicants they will eventually hire, and for which occupations they will offer training. Once an applicant has been offered an apprenticeship position, the agreement is formalized in a training contract.

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[10] *Corporatism* in Germany's dual system is characterized by a high level of joint decision making. Involved in these joint decisions are the federal, provincial and local governments, employer groups, unions and school representatives. A more tripartite form of corporatism characterizes Germany's labour market in general, in which governments make social and economic policy in consultation with trade unions and employer groups (Lehmann 2000).

Unions play an important and co-determining role in Germany's apprenticeship system. In businesses with more than five staff, employees have the right to elect a works council to represent their interests on a management level. Unions thus have significant co-determination rights concerning management matters such as hiring, lay-offs, work reorganization, and training. Rieble-Aubourg (1996, 182) argues that this constraint on management flexibility has provided substantial incentives for management to invest in their labour force. Furthermore, labour bargaining is usually carried out industry wide, rather than company specific. This leads to relatively small wage differentials between companies in the same industry, which in turn reduces the poaching of trained workers. Concerns about poaching are often presented as an argument for not training their own workforce by Canadian employers (Betcherman, McMullen, and Davidman 1998).

The federal government is responsible for overseeing the training in firms and defines the required duration of the training period, the description and designation of the job, the knowledge and capabilities associated with it, as well as achievement criteria (Pritchard 1992). The Federal Institute for Vocational Training (*Bundesinstitut für Berufsbildung*, BiBB), founded as a result of the 1969 Vocational Training Act, makes recommendations to and counsels the various ministries of the federal government that are involved in vocational training, most notably the Federal Ministry of Education and Science, the Federal Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs, and the Federal Ministry of Economics (Münch 1995). The chambers (*Kammer*) are employers' organizations on a regional level, with obligatory membership. Generally, their tasks are to promote the interests of their members and to provide leadership in the respective trade (Pritchard 1992). In terms of vocational training legislation, the chambers are responsible for such issues as controlling whether companies and their trainers qualify to offer vocational training, promoting vocational training by providing counselling to enterprises and trainees, supervising the quality of the apprentices' training, organizing their final examinations and issuing certificates, and organizing continuing vocational training (Münch 1995). The *Länder* (federal states) give guidelines for general education, and for special and optional subjects. They also define the number of contact hours and decide how many days a week an apprentice is to be released to attend vocational school (Pritchard 1992).

Thus, vocational training in the dual system is characterized by close co-operation on many levels. The *Principle of Consensus* is a crucial aspect of the success of the dual system in Germany (Schlicht 1994). Interests of both employers and employees have been taken into account through legislation specifying that employer and employee representatives be present in equal numbers in all institutions and committees dealing with vocational training (Münch 1995). While this *Principle of Consensus* ensures that training regulations, once passed, are met with universal approval, it also makes the process of change within the system rather slow and cumbersome.

Participants in the Dual System

Apprentices are workers and, as part of the workforce, are represented by unions. They have training contracts, are counted as full-time employees, are covered by social insurance programs, are paid for attending part-time vocational schools, and are protected against dismissal under the Vocational Training Act. Although there are no official entry requirements into the dual system, who enters it and into which occupations is very much defined by the three-tier school system in Germany. Traditionally, graduates from the

Hauptschule and the *Realschule* would leave the general education system at age 15 or 16 and *Gymnasium* graduates would continue their education at universities. Recently, this general "model" of participation in the dual system has experienced what I earlier referred to as displacement competition (Schober 1984). Educational reforms have allowed an increasing number of young people to attend *Gymnasium*. While this has led to an overcrowding of universities, it has also increased the number of *Gymnasium* graduates who choose to enter an apprenticeship rather than university. Increasingly, employers hire *Gymnasium* graduates for apprenticeship positions that may have previously been held by *Realschule* graduates (e.g., apprenticeships in the banking and insurance industry) and they in turn are hired for positions traditionally held by *Hauptschule* graduates (e.g., automobile mechanics). As a result of the increasing number of *Realschule* and *Gymnasium* graduates entering apprenticeship training, the often-quoted average age of 15 for a German youth entering his/her apprenticeship has recently moved up to 17 years (Heidenreich 1998, 327; Münch 1995, 42).

Today, apprentices with a *Realschule* certificate or university entrance qualification outnumber those who have graduated from the *Hauptschule* stream. Official data for 1999 show that only 30 percent of all apprentices had entered the dual system with the *Hauptschule* certificate as their highest level of educational attainment, while 36 percent had graduated with a *Realschule* diploma and 16 percent entered an apprenticeship with a university entrance qualification, i.e., the *Abitur* (Bundesministerium für Bildung und Forschung 2001).[11]

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[11] Percentages do not add up to 100 percent, as some apprentices enter the dual system without formal school leaving certificates (2.5 percent) or after having attended school-based courses and preparatory schemes and programs (12.1 percent).

Youth Apprenticeships, Improved Transitions and Reproduction of Inequality

Proponents of youth apprenticeships point to their function of creating useful institutional structures for transitions (Evans, Taylor and Heinz 1993), and of providing youth not entering post-secondary schooling with meaningful career alternatives, thus ultimately promoting greater equality in the labour market (Alberta Apprenticeship and Industry Training Board 1996; Buechtemann, Schupp and Soloff 1994; Economic Council of Canada 1992; Evans, Taylor and Heinz 1993; Hamilton 1990). However, such programs have also been charged with streaming lower-class students into dead-end career options that do very little to facilitate long-term success in the labour market and may actually reinforce existing social inequalities (Geißler 1991; Kantor 1994).

Successful Transitions

There is plenty of evidence that young people entering the Canadian labour market without any secondary credentials are most disadvantaged in terms of unemployment, employment stability, and income. Unemployment decreases with educational attainment (Table 5) just as income potential increases (Table 6). Proponents of youth apprenticeships in Canada are thus able to point to labour market advantages of participation, particularly if the targeted group is students who may be at risk of dropping out of high school, or of not being able to complete the academic high school diploma requirements.

Unfortunately, the data in Tables 5 and 6 are based on income and unemployment figures for graduates from both the "adult" apprenticeship system and full-time vocational, or technical schools. Given the fairly recent introduction of youth apprenticeship programs, there are no data tracking the employment and salary outcomes of individuals who participated in youth apprenticeships at the secondary level.

Table 5. Unemployment Rate in Canada by Educational Attainment and Age Group

	All Levels of Education	High School or Less	College and Trade	University
25-54 Age Group (1998)	7%	10%	6%	4%
15-24 Age Group (1996)	16%	18%	12%	9%

Source: Adapted from Statistics Canada, 1997 National Graduates Survey (Taillon and Paju 1999)

Table 6. Canadian Population 15 Years and Over and Average Earnings by Highest Degree, Certificate or Diploma, 1996

Highest Level of Schooling	Less than grade 9	Grades 9-13 without high school graduation	High School	High school but less than university	University
Average Earnings (Canadian Average: $26,474)	$19,377	$18,639	$22,846	$25,838	$42,054

Source: Statistics Canada, 1996 Census Nation Tables (1996)

Comparative data between Canada and Germany provide further evidence that youth apprenticeships reduce unemployment for those not entering post-secondary education. Table 7 indicates that, in both Germany and Canada, young people who have not completed secondary education experience the highest levels of unemployment.

Table 7: Youth Unemployment Rates in Canada and Germany by Level of Educational Attainment and Age Group; 1998

	All Levels	Below High School	High School/ Apprenticeship	College	University
Ages 15-19					
Canada	20%	22.7%	15.8%		
Germany	7.6%	6.9%	7.3%		
Ages 20-24					
Canada	12.6%	22.6%	12.2%	9.1%	8.8%
Germany	9.9%	16.3%	8.2%	Missing	Missing
Ages 25-29					
Canada	8.9%	18.5%	10.1%	7.0%	4.8%
Germany	8.7%	20.4%	7.7%	4.8%	4.9%

Source: OECD, Education at a Glance (2000)

Table 7 also shows that Germany's dual system, compared to Canadian apprenticeship programs, further reduces the chances of unemployment compared to only a high school certificate, with 15.8 percent of Canadian youth aged 15 to 19 unemployed, compared to only 7.3 percent in Germany in the same age group.

A RAP satisfaction study commissioned by Alberta Learning and the Alberta Apprenticeship and Industry Training Board found evidence that the major goals of RAP, providing alternative learning pathways and assisting school-work transitions, were being met. A majority of respondents agreed that RAP provides an incentive for students to do well in school, helps students to become more focussed, contributes to skills development, and provides incentives for students to stay in school (HarGroup Management Consultants Inc. 2001). Unfortunately, this report contains no data on the socio-economic background of participants, making it impossible to estimate whether one important target group, namely lower-class students and those at risk of dropping out, are actually participating in the program.

Reproducing Inequality

Vocational education reforms and the introduction of programs like RAP in North America are part of the discourse of *new vocationalism*, which promotes a more progressive approach to vocational education by eschewing traditional academic-vocational divisions (Grubb 1996, 3). Benson (1997, 202) argues that this integration of academic and vocational learning ultimately leads to the acquisition of "more, not less academic knowledge" by "embodying the pedagogical strengths of vocational education into the presentation of theoretical concepts." This integration of vocational practice is meant to make academic knowledge more meaningful and accessible to the majority of students. In other words, programs like RAP are seen as essentially empowering in that they make learning more relevant to students and thus improve the possibilities of an individual's success, both in the education system and the labour market.

In spite of the generally positive assessments outlined above, Kantor (1994, 446) claims that "the arguments for apprenticeship are based on flawed assumptions about the nature of the youth labour market and the connections between school and work as well as on unsettling assumptions about the purposes of public education." While those in favour of apprenticeships argue that offering alternatives for youth not entering post-secondary programs will make education more democratic, Kantor insists that apprenticeships may actually lead to a qualification of questionable value and more dead-end jobs. The initial optimism that youth apprenticeships promote more stable and better-paid careers needs to be tempered by recognizing what the data actually say when graduates from apprenticeship programs are compared with college or university graduates (refer to Tables 5, 6, and 7). Vocational credentials, such as those received through apprenticeships, provide a form of insurance against unemployment and poverty in comparison to what one would have experienced without any secondary credentials. However, there is no denying that unemployment rates remain much lower and income potential is much higher for those with higher post-secondary credentials. This gap is evident immediately after graduation and only grows wider throughout the life course. For instance, a 1997 survey of the labour market outcomes of 1995 graduates from trades/vocational, career/technical, and university programs shows that, two years after graduation, 15.4 percent of graduates from trade/vocational programs were unemployed, compared to only 9.5 percent from career/technical programs, and 8.9 percent from universities (Taillon and Paju 1999). Of course, from a functionalist perspective,[12] this would not be seen as a problem, as people sort themselves into different occupations according to their abilities and society's needs. However, more critical observers have argued that, instead of equalizing opportunities for the least advantaged, or of creating an equilibrium between labour supply and demand, youth apprenticeships will only add another dimension of inequality to an already unequal system, by streaming students from less advantaged backgrounds into lower paying jobs (Kantor 1994, 162).

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[12] A functionalist explanation of a social activity or phenomenon focuses on its consequences and beneficial effects on the social system (Little 1991, 92). A social activity may thus contribute to the maintenance of stability of the social system, it may fulfill social needs, or it may have some other latent function (Abercrombie et al. 1994, 176).

Despite the massive expansion of the Canadian post-secondary education system in the past four decades, and a resulting wider range of educational outcomes within each socio-economic category, aggregate Canadian data show that SES is still the strongest determinant of educational attainment. Whether measured by high school dropout rates, achievement on standardized tests, or university attendance, working-class youth do not fare as well as do youth from middle- and upper-class backgrounds (Davies 1999, 139). For instance, the national survey of 1995 graduates carried out by Statistics Canada and Human Resources Development Canada (HRDC) clearly shows a relationship between social origin (father's education) and educational attainment. Thirty-one percent of university graduates in 1995 had a father with a university degree, compared to only 8 percent of graduates from a trade/vocational program (Taillon and Paju 1999, 16). A 2000 survey of a pre-RAP internship organized by *Careers: The Next Generation*[illegible] collected some indirect information related to the class background of participating students by asking whether their parents themselves had an occupation in the trades. Of all the parents of pre-RAP interns who responded to the survey, 41 percent were employed in the trades (Alberta Finance 2000, 10). Since only approximately 14 percent of Canadian full-time, full-year workers hold a trades certificate or diploma (Ferrer and Riddell 2001), one would expect the percentage of parents with occupations in the trades

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[13] *Careers: The Next Generation* (CNG) is an industry-based foundation promoting RAP in schools and with employers. Another function of CNG is to act as a quasi-broker between schools, interested students, and interested employers. If a student and an employer come together and are interested in entering an apprenticeship relationship, and if this is facilitated by CNG, the student is required to first complete a summer internship with the employer, which is meant to allow both employer and student to assess "compatibility" and gives both the chance to withdraw before entering an apprenticeship contract formally.

to be significantly lower. Such findings indicate a socially "reproductive" aspect to RAP that is seldom acknowledged (Lehmann and Taylor 2003). Similarly, German data show that, of all first-year university students in 1998, only 14 percent came from a family in which fathers fell into the occupational category of "worker," that is, they were performing blue collar, manual labour, even though manual workers represent 34 percent of the labour force (Bundesministerium für Bildung and Forschung 2001).

These findings obviously raise a number of serious questions regarding the different functions of youth apprenticeships. From a strictly economist perspective, policy-makers should only be concerned with the need to supply the labour market with much-needed young, qualified skilled workers. As for the school-work transitions purposes of youth apprenticeships, however, issues become a lot murkier. Are we seeing in youth apprenticeships a sinister streaming process that formalizes a social class-reproductive process by removing lower-achieving, working-class high school students from the academic mainstream and thrusting them prematurely into the workplace? Or do youth apprenticeships offer a non-academic alternative to more practically oriented students that allows them to get a head start on gaining a positive, vocational identity, without closing the door to higher education? And where in these largely institutional scenarios do the young people see themselves fitting? Are they being streamed into apprenticeships by "the system," without their full knowledge of what is happening to them? Or are they actively engaged in decisions that reflect their own preferences and dispositions toward their careers and life course? In the following chapter, I review the empirical and theoretical literature that has engaged with these problems and dilemmas.

Chapter 3

A Review of the Literature on Agency, Structural and Cultural Reproduction in School-Work Transitions

There is a large body of empirical, and a much smaller body of theoretical, literature that have investigated the complex process commonly referred to as school-work transitions. Much of the policy literature and debate is situated within a human capital approach that assumes a straightforward relationship between education and labour market outcomes. Most policy initiatives have squarely aimed at increasing educational attainment to facilitate labour market success, including stay-in-school initiatives or vocational programs such as Alberta's RAP. Historically, the sociological literature has largely been characterized by a structural approach, which investigates relationships between social origin, gender or ethnicity, and school-work transition outcomes. More recently, these approaches have been criticized for overemphasizing the capacity of institutional structures to reinforce social inequality. Researchers and theorists have begun to explore the intricate inter-relationships between individual choice, or agency, and social context, or structure. This chapter will review this extensive and varied literature. As human capital concepts inform explicitly or implicitly much of the current policy debate, it is useful to take human capital theory as the starting point.

The Human Capital Model

Human capital theory is premised on the assumption of a free labour market—a market in which people compete for jobs on the basis of their abilities, skills, and experience (Becker 1993). Individuals, therefore, will invest in their skills and abilities in order to increase their human capital and thus their market value. This, of course, also implies that individuals understand perfectly this relationship. Similar to allocation processes in functional theories of education,[14] human capital theory argues that individuals increase their human capital to the best of their capacities in order to assume specific roles in the labour market.

Human capital theory also assumes that access to the means to increase one's human capital is not restricted by such factors as class, gender, or ethnicity. Superficially, human capital models presuppose individual agency and treat people's learning capacity as a resource like other natural resources in the production process that, when effectively used, is profitable to individuals, enterprises, the economy, and society as a whole. Work-entry problems of youth therefore are seen to arise from deficiencies in their own human capital. Consequently, school-work transition problems must be resolved individually by investing more rationally in one's human capital, and institutionally by reforming education such that it provides better linkages between schools and the labour market. Alberta's RAP is just such a program designed to provide better linkages into the labour market, particularly for those young people who might otherwise enter the workforce as unskilled labour. Following human capital arguments, the labour market should be receptive to the skills, attitudes, and credentials developed in such a program.

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[14] Although more closely associated with rational choice theories, the human capital model can also be interpreted as an extension of functionalist arguments in which individuals' behaviour is seen as a response to societal needs. Similar to human capital theories, functionalist accounts of education consider streaming and eventual adult roles as based solely on school performance and not on socio-economic status, gender, ethnicity or other structural forces. Schooling, essentially, is interpreted as a contest or competition through academic performance, and educational success or failure form the building foundation for later roles in society. For a summary of Parsonian functionalism in education, see e.g., Taylor (1994) or Morrow and Torres (1995).

Furthermore, young people entering these programs would be expected to do so fully aware of these linkages and the value of the credentials/skills they are about to receive for their future careers.

Empirical evidence suggests that most young people understand the relationship between educational attainment and employment outcomes postulated by human capital theorists, as all Western industrial countries have seen an increase in the educational attainment of their population (Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development 2000). However, critics of human capital theory point to its unrealistic assumptions about labour markets and employment allocation processes. The market is not always capable of matching human capital with career and employment opportunities. Human capital theory simply cannot account for the increasing number of well-educated youth who are unemployed, underemployed, in part-time and temporary positions and, underpaid (e.g., Betcherman and Leckie 1997; Jackson 1996, Statistics Canada 1997). Furthermore, Ray and Mickelson (1993, 12) ask to what extent corporate restructuring has created conditions that actively discourage some young people from investing in an education for success in a labour market that has lost its credibility as a fair mechanism for distributing opportunities. Their argument stands human capital on its head. These authors suggest that young people at risk *actively do not* invest in their human capital, as they perceive such an investment as a waste of time, money, and effort in the face of declining career and employment opportunities in a post-industrial labour market. This point of view echoes arguments made by resistance theorists, whose work will be discussed in more detail later in this section. However, there is little empirical evidence to suggest that young people, with maybe the exception of a small minority of "at-risk" youth, withdraw from preparation for work in the way suggested by Ray and Mickelson.

Rosenbaum et al. (1990) criticize the human capital model for its inability to account for a number of external factors, such as labour market policies or employers' hiring preferences, as well as its flawed assumption that everybody has equal access to the means of increasing one's human capital. As this study will show, Germany's labour market structures in which access to occupations is restricted to those who have been officially certified provides clearly distinct opportunities to those entering different school-work transition pathways. The absence of such structures in Canada challenges human capital theory's assumption of perfectly transparent labour markets.

Although educational attainment has generally increased in most Western industrialized countries, access to the means of improving one's human capital and subsequent payoff in the labour market remain strongly related to structural factors such as class (e.g., Andres et al. 1999; Davies 1999), gender (e.g., Damm-Rüger 1994; Gaskell 1985) and ethnicity (e.g., Alba, Handl and Müller 1994; Michelson 1990). It appears then that human capital theory may well provide an *ex post facto* explanation of why we have witnessed such an increase in secondary and post-secondary education over the past few decades. However, human capital theory does little to explain why old inequalities have persisted and if, why, or how young people themselves are agents in these socially reproductive processes. Furthermore, human capital theory treats schools as if they existed within an ideological vacuum. Human capital theory cannot explain, for instance, how tracking and streaming of students in secondary schools, or the dominance of white middle-class values in curriculum, may contribute to the reproduction of social inequality. These issues, however, are central in the structural and cultural reproduction literature that questions the meritocratic hopes that have been pinned on educational expansion.

Structural Reproduction

Sociologists concerned with issues of structural inequality have taken different approaches to the study of educational attainment and different forms and outcomes of school-work transitions. These approaches are usually subsumed under the categories of social stratification and status attainment research. While social stratification researchers seek to explore the degree to which certain characteristics, such as SES, gender, ethnicity, and geographic location affect educational attainment, status attainment researchers have been more interested in the mechanisms that lead to this reproduction of social inequality. As such, stratification researchers have been preoccupied with investigating who does not get ahead, while status attainment researchers have focused more on those who do.

Persistent Class Inequalities: Stratification and Structural Reproduction

Several national school-work transitions studies in Canada have shown little evidence of a decline of structural factors predicting young people's occupational aspirations and expectations (de Broucker and Lavallée 1998; Fortin 1998; Guppy 1984). Despite the massive expansion of the Canadian post-secondary education system in the past several decades, and a resulting wider range of educational attainment within each socio-economic category, SES is still the strongest determinant of educational attainment. Whether measured by high school dropout rates, achievement on standardized tests, or university attendance, working- and lower-class youth do not fare as well as youth from middle and upper class backgrounds (Davies 1999, 139).

Encouragingly, gender is one structural category in which occupational aspirations and expectations as well as educational attainment have experienced a significant shift. While young women in earlier studies (i.e., in the '70s) were less likely than young men to aspire to higher status employment, by the '90s, occupational aspirations and expectations of young women had surpassed those of young men (Andres et al. 1999). Nevertheless, occupational outcomes for many women have yet to match their aspirations or educational attainment (Damm-Rüger 1994; Geller 1996; Solga and Konietzka 2000). On a similar note, Davies (1999) argues that in Canada ethnicity, like gender, plays a less important role than social class origin in determining educational attainment. In contrast, Alba et al. (1994) have found that ethnic minorities in Germany face significant disadvantages in the educational system, even after controlling for socio-economic status.

Andres et al. (1999), comparing results from five Canadian longitudinal school-work transitions studies started in 1973, 1975, 1985, 1989 and 1996 respectively (Anisef et al. 2000; Krahn and Mosher 1992; Looker 1993; Lowe, Krahn and Bowlby 1997), found that the influence of class-based structural variables has indeed persisted over time. Both parents' education and occupational status have remained strong predictors of their children's occupational aspirations and expectations. Young people with university-educated parents are still more likely to attend university, while those young people not participating in any form of post-secondary education tend to come from families in which neither parent had attended university. Furthermore, Andres and Krahn (1999) noted an interaction effect on post-secondary educational attainment between parental education and students' enrolment in academic or non-academic high school programs. Respondents who had completed academic programs in high school and were from university-educated families were much more likely to have completed university, compared to those who were also in academic high school programs, but had non-university educated parents (ibid., 69).

While some recent German studies have found a slight decline in the relationship between social origin and educational attainment (Henz and Maas 1995; Müller and Haun 1994), other research in Germany and Europe largely confirms the findings of the Canadian studies discussed above. Educational expansion in Germany, as in most other industrialized countries, has led to a number of unintended consequences, rather than the goal of equalizing life course chances across social strata. For example, Germany has begun to experience credential inflation (see e.g., Collins 1979).[15] This has increased the need for high levels of educational attainment and, in turn, educational aspirations have risen. Despite Germany's tripartite secondary education system and the pervasiveness of the dual system, in 1989 only 10 percent of parents were satisfied with a *Hauptschule* (i.e., the lowest school stream) certificate for their children, while an ever-growing number of parents expect their offspring to reach *Abitur* (i.e., the university entrance credential) (Mansel 1993, 37). Yet, aggregate data continue to show that chances to attain these high levels of education are circumscribed by social origin, and that children with a higher socio-economic background have benefitted from educational expansion more than any others (Friebel et al. 2000; Jonsson, Mills and Müller 1996; Kerckhoff 1995; Savit and Blossfeld 1993, 1996). Writing about the German experience, Mansel (1993, 38) suggests that

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[15] The idea of credential inflation stems from Collins' (1979) observation that despite the expansion of education systems in industrialized nations, social inequality by and large remained unchanged, albeit at an overall higher level of educational attainment. This is due to the fact that the educational credentials necessary to enter certain career paths (particularly in the professions) have risen with the overall level of attainment.

> Despite massive changes in production and employment systems (like, for instance, the move toward a service economy ...), and despite the (either real or at least anticipated) processes of individualization and the resulting de-structuring of life courses and increase in occupational alternatives, the structural relationship between parent generation – education system – occupational hierarchy and career potential has not opened up (my translation from the German original).

Kelle and Zinn's (1998, 87) longitudinal study demonstrates that Germany's dual system represents a powerful institution that "guides, controls and influences the occupational life course of young German adults." The authors found that social origin has a significant influence on access to preparation for particular occupations. Similarly, a German-English comparison of school-work transition processes found that career trajectories of young people in both countries could be traced to family socio-economic origins which generally led to broadly similar routes to employment with ultimately predictable destinations in the labour market (Bynner and Roberts 1991, xvi).

Friebel et al. (2000), in a review of Germany's educational expansion in the '70s and '80s, conclude that success in the educational system is so highly correlated with social origin that one simply cannot conclude that educational expansion has equalized life course chances. They show that educational reforms have most benefitted the upper-middle class of civil servants and white-collar workers (ibid., 71-72), a finding that very much corresponds to the neo-Weberian notion of credentialism (cf. Collins 1977; Murphy

1988, 1994).[16] Relying on their own massive longitudinal research project, which followed 1979 graduates from the three different German school streams in a northern German city, Friebel et al (2000) demonstrate how school placement into one of the three secondary education streams (*Hauptschule*, *Realschule*, *Gymnasium*) and resulting educational attainment significantly depend on parents' educational status. For instance, while nearly 60 percent of youth whose parents' educational status was considered "high" completed the highest school stream (*Gymnasium*) with the *Abitur*, only 11 percent of youth whose parents had "low" levels education did. Even more telling may be the fact that none of the children of highly-educated parents were found in the lowest school stream, the *Hauptschule* (ibid., 134). By 1997, nearly 20 years after their sample was first surveyed, this difference in attainment had essentially solidified, although members of the group characterized by low levels of parental education were able to gain some ground. Through successful completion of apprenticeships, upgrading of their secondary educational credentials via the "second educational path" (*zweiter Bildungsweg*)[17] and subsequent university attendance, 32 percent of those whose parents had only low levels of education had completed university by 1997, compared to 71 percent of those whose parents had high levels of education (ibid., 164).

In a Canadian study following a group of 1973 Ontario high school graduates, Anisef et al. (2000) found relatively similar results when looking at educational attainment and its relationship to social origin. Rather than using parents' educational attainment as the independent variable, these researchers applied the concept of SES. In 1979, six years after graduation from high school, 53.2 percent of the sample with a high SES background had completed university, compared to only 15.5 percent of those with a low SES background (ibid., 61).

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[16] Arguing from a neo-Weberian perspective, Collins (1977) and Murphy (1988, 1994) suggest that instead of reducing inequality, mass education has allowed the middle classes to solidify their privileged position, as ever higher educational credentials have become prerequisites for entry into professional careers.

[17] The *zweite Bildungsweg* in Germany refers to a variety of school types and programs that allow individuals to upgrade their educational credentials over time. For instance, *Hauptschule* graduates might after successful completion of a trades apprenticeship attend some form of evening school to receive their *Abitur* and eventually study at a university.

The research reviewed above is largely descriptive, although it consistently makes the same point about intergenerational transmission of inequality. This consistent finding can be interpreted within a neo-Marxist tradition (see below), but the processes through which inequality is reproduced, and the different roles played by structure and agency, have not been well theorized.

Streaming and Stratification: Structural Neo-Marxist Explanations

Neo-Marxist theories of education generally claim that schooling in capitalist society thwarts full personal development and legitimizes social inequality, rather than reducing it. Education is interpreted through the needs of the bourgeoisie to reproduce the conditions necessary to extract surplus value from the proletariat.

Bowles and Gintis's (1976) *correspondence thesis* states that the social relations in the educational system structurally correspond to those of production. In other words, education socializes students to the discipline and fragmentation of the workplace through the power relationships experienced at school which replicate the hierarchical division of labour in workplaces. The school and learning environments experienced by students streamed into different programs or school types reinforce the internal organization of capitalist enterprises through their different emphasis on rule following in vocational programs or independent thinking in academic programs.

Not surprisingly, research on streaming and school placement shows that working-class students are more likely to be streamed into less challenging programs in high school (Curtis, Livingstone and Smaller 1992). Kerckhoff (1995) claims that highly stratified educational systems (e.g., Germany) produce a stronger association between socio-economic status of origin and educational attainment because of earlier streaming and sorting. As described in Chapter 2, the dual system in Germany is based on an early and rigorous streaming process at the end of elementary school (Grade 4) that has come closer to an "effective" reproduction of class inequalities than, for instance, the Canadian education systems (Shavit and Blossfeld 1993). Despite educational reforms and an opening up of higher education in the '70s, there is ample evidence that streaming in Germany continues to occur along class, gender, and ethnic dimensions (Alba, Handl and Müller 1994; Damm-Rüger 1994; Gellert 1996).

While the early streaming process in Germany essentially sorts young people into paths leading to apprenticeships as early as after Grade 4, streaming in the Canadian school system is more closely related to participation in vocational education programs at the secondary level. Correspondence theorists argue that vocational education reduces students' chances of attending college because it offers a more restricted curriculum. Students are less likely to work alongside highly motivated and academically successful students, and the vocational students' sense of self-worth is reduced as a result of being placed in a less challenging vocational program. This in turn dampens expectations and aspirations (e.g., Hallinan and Williams 1990; Vanfossen, Jones and Spade 1987). Research on American catholic schools, which apparently have policies of placing fewer students in lower streams, has shown that a greater proportion of working-class students in these schools score well on standardized tests, graduate from high school, and attend post-secondary institutions (Lee, Bryk and Smith 1993). Proponents of vocational education, on the other hand, argue that many vocational students would likely drop out if these programs did not exist, and that the problem is not so much one of reducing a vocational student's chances of entering university, but one of providing an alternative to unemployment and low-skill, low-wage employment.[18] This, of course, is one of the main policy thrusts behind Alberta's RAP, as well as the youth apprenticeship programs in other provinces.

Using a strict correspondence theoretical framework, I would expect to find a concentration of working-class youth in apprenticeships, while academic programs would be dominated by children of middle- and upper-class parents. This correspondence between class background and educational attainment and also occupational aspirations should remain largely invisible to the individual. However, even if such a correlation exists, this overly deterministic argument leaves little room for class-based (e.g., working-class) agency (Livingstone 1994). Nor does it consider young people's individual choices, or the ideological and cultural processes in individual homes, schools and larger social environments that might be implicated in streaming decisions, school placement, and ultimately, educational attainment.

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[18] Arum and Shavit (1995) found that the average ability and socio-economic origin of vocational-track students were lower than those of general and academic-track students. At the same time, graduates from vocational tracks who did not go on to college were more likely to find employment as skilled workers than were graduates of the general track not going on to college. In other words, compared to the alternative of general education, vocational education did indeed reduce the risk of non-employment and of unskilled employment (ibid., 196). However, Arum and Shavit caution about a too literal interpretation of these findings. While they support claims by proponents of vocational education programs regarding their occupational benefits for certain students, they do not demonstrate that vocational education actually alters the overall structures of labour market opportunities.

Important as these stratification studies are to the understanding of aggregate trends in educational participation and attainment, and in identifying structural barriers in school-work transitions processes, they generally lack insight into the actual decision making of individuals and the importance of difficult-to-measure variables, such as specific institutional structures (both in education and the labour market) or high school curriculum. For instance, these studies cannot explain why some lower-class children make successful transitions into post-secondary education, while the majority do not. And for those who do not make the transition to higher education, these studies usually can only tell us that the transition has not been made, but not why. Research within the status attainment theoretical tradition has tried to come at least a few steps closer to answering these questions.

Status Attainment Research

Status attainment models, as originally theorized by Duncan and Hodge (1963) and Blau and Duncan (1967), were concerned with the two key issues: 1) how parents' (usually fathers') education and occupation influenced a child's education and first job; and 2) how this initial status affects the child's subsequent occupational development. As with theories of structural reproduction, status attainment models generally found a strong correlation between parents' occupational standing and a child's completed years of schooling, although later, modified models (e.g., the *Wisconsin* model) also took into account cognitive ability, academic performance, others' influences, and educational and occupational aspirations (Sewell, Haller, and Portes 1969). Research in this tradition has shown, for instance, that the effects of parental SES on educational and occupational attainment are mediated by social-psychological factors such as the influence of significant others and an individual's own educational and occupational aspirations (Jencks, Crouse and Mueser 1983; Looker and Pineo 1983).

Reviewing empirical evidence from North America, Germany and other industrialized nations, Heinz (1995, 129) found evidence of a complex ascribing process between family social status, workplace demands, and occupational biography of parents on the one hand, and the interests, value systems and social-psychological competences of children on the other hand. Kohn and colleagues extensively investigated the influences of parents' (mostly fathers') work conditions (particularly the level of self-directedness) on parental attitudes and styles, and on forms of interaction and topics of discussion within the family. These family relationships, in turn, have an important impact on a child's psychological development, including the development of educational and occupational aspirations (e.g., Kohn and Schooler 1983).

The problems with status attainment research are similar to those previously outlined for social stratification models, namely the almost exclusive focus on parental SES. However, as noted above, more sophisticated status attainment research complements socio-economic factors with more social-psychological dimensions. Yet, what is still lacking is an understanding of how the formation of educational and occupational aspirations is a result of individuals' engagement with their institutional and cultural environment. For instance, how are aspirations supported, guided, and discouraged by specific school forms, like Canada's comprehensive high schools or Germany's streamed, tri-partite secondary schools? What role is played by curriculum, the school environment, and conditions in the labour market? Finally, how do the individual actors themselves interpret their aspirations and motivations? In both social stratification and status attainment research, the young people under investigation are essentially treated as empty receptacles, their minds a *tabula rasa*. Educational and occupational aspirations and socially reproductive processes happen to them. Yet, most of our own experiences tell us that we are not mere puppets whose strings are pulled by some invisible yet all powerful structural force. What is needed then is some conceptualization of individual involvement, in other words agency, to describe young people's transitions from high school.

Agency in the Transitions from High School

Responding to the overly deterministic view expressed in much of the structural reproduction literature, an alternative research tradition has focused on young people's active involvement in the school-work transitions process. This literature has tried to explain why at least some young people manage to escape the shackles of social origin, and how, sometimes, young people themselves are involved in the reproduction of their social status. Evans (2002) suggests that the relatively recent emergence of the concept "agency" in youth transitions research reflects the realization that the influence of social structures on youth transitions is neither direct not entirely deterministic. Instead, "young people's experiences of life were complicated by the fact that they can react and respond to structural influences, that they can make their own decisions with respect to a number of major, as well as minor, life experiences and that they can actively shape some important dimensions of their experiences" (ibid., 246). Similarly, Anisef et al. (2000) preface their analysis of life course experiences of a 1973 Ontario high school cohort by insisting that "personal agency is always present in the transition from youth to adulthood; young people make distinctive choices about their education and career pathways at critical junctures." (ibid., 22) According to Evans (2002, 248), agency in youth transitions is understood as

> Input from young adults as individuals (to transitional processes), emphasising those aspects of social engagement which are predominantly individual, creative, proactive and involve resisting external pressure.

I will begin this review of the role of agency in youth transitions with two key concepts that emerged in the '70s: 1) resistance theory, as a neo-Marxist response to Bowles and Gintis's deterministic account of reproduction; and 2) rational choice theory. I will then discuss more recent conceptualizations of agency as situated within a structural and cultural context, following notions of *late modernity* (Giddens 1990), *risk society* and *individualization* (Beck 1986, 1990) and *structuration theory* (Giddens 1984).

Resistance

Notions of active working-class resistance as the basis for social reproduction in the education system originated with Paul Willis's landmark 1977 study *Learning to Labour*. In this ethnographic study of a small group of working-class "lads" in a school in a poor area of Birmingham, Willis proposes that the lads' rebellious, anti-school behaviour is a reflection of working-class resentment toward the middle-class values embedded in the educational system. However, the unintended consequence of their resistance is ultimately a reproduction of their own class position, as their aim is to leave school as soon as possible and to enter the working-class world of manual labour. Willis rejects claims that structural forces exclude working-class youth from achieving higher educational attainment and thus social mobility. Instead, he suggests that the lower level of educational attainment of working-class youth is not so much a result of an inability to compete at school, but of an unwillingness to compete, rooted in a deep class-cultural antagonism. Working-class youth are seen as actively and purposely resisting middle-class notions of mobility through higher education. Instead, they embrace working-class values associated with participation in the workforce. Pride in their working-class background and anticipation of the "real world of employment" leads them to oppose mainstream school culture, in which they see expressed resentment toward manual, working-class labour. Thus, an important element of resistance theory is its insistence on purposive, active oppositional behaviour. School resentment and rejection is not seen as simply disappointment with the school system or fatalism about the future. Davies (1994, 92) argues that resistance needs to be interpreted as something more:

> Student actions are said to symbolize an ability to *penetrate* the middle-class mobility ethic with critical insights in the real, degraded meaninglessness of work in capitalism." (emphasis in original)

In other words, resistance is interpreted as a critique of capitalist subordination, albeit a partial, often poorly articulated and largely symbolic critique.

However, Willis (1977) argues that his lads' active resistance to the middle-class school culture ultimately reproduces their position in the existing class culture. Unlike the determinism inherent in Bowles and Gintis's correspondence principle (1976), which views dominant ideologies and social structures as impenetrable, Willis maintains that reproduction of class relations does not necessarily have to be an inevitable outcome of resistance. Willis (1977, 175-176) argues that while the resistance of the working-class youth he studied ultimately reproduced their class positions and thus "worked for capitalism,"

> this must not be allowed to obscure the struggles which through uncertainties motor the working parts. Many aspects of the lads' culture, for instance, are challenging and subversive and remain threatening. There are many breaks, lags, antagonisms, deep struggles and real subversive logics within and behind cultural processes of reproduction which fight for outcomes other than those which satisfy the system for the moment.

By this Willis means that a capacity for opposition and change still exists.

Willis's study has been highly influential and often cited. A great number of studies, in both Europe and North America, have in one way or another paid respect to Willis, despite the fact that his study may simply reflect the specific nature of class relations in Britain in the '70s (Gaskell 1985; Tanner 1990).

Most empirical work carried out in Canada, for instance, finds little evidence to support Willis's thesis. In a large-scale, quantitative test of Willis's resistance thesis, using secondary data from a survey of Ontario high school students, Davies (1995) found only slim support for the notion that class reproduction occurs through working-class disobedience and resistance at school. Davies speculates that this might be due to the more pervasive North American ethic of upward mobility through education, as well as recent changes toward a more post-industrial society, which have further highlighted the credential value of schooling, even to working-class students (ibid., 682). Other Canadian research within the resistance tradition tends to uncover a form of school opposition that appears to be much less linked to class consciousness. Tanner (1990), studying high school dropouts in Edmonton, found a rather muted criticism of high school that seemed largely expressed in a preference for more vocational education than an outright rejection of the school culture. Furthermore, in the absence of strong traditional working-class communities, the Edmonton high school dropouts seemed as keen as their peers still in high school to attain dominant (i.e., middle-class) social goals.

Similarly, Gaskell (1985) found that many working-class females in a British Columbia high school, by opting out of academic streams and selecting vocational and non-academic courses, saw themselves as making real choices given their context and background. As in Tanner's study, these choices are not a rejection of the dominant school culture seen in Willis's lads. Still, the young men and women do see these choices as a form of resistance to the norm (e.g., mainstream academic values). What they share with Willis's lads, however, is the fact that they may not realize how this resistance reproduces their class and gender roles (Davies 1994, 93).

While the ethos of upward mobility may create a different social and cultural environment in North America that limits the applicability of resistance theory, specific institutional features of labour markets, education systems, and welfare arrangements also need to be considered. For instance, unions in Germany have achieved co-determination rights in matters concerning apprenticeships on both a federal, provincial, and a company-internal level (Greinert 1994a). The dual system in Germany has provided successful careers and strong, positive vocational identities for generations of young people with lower levels of educational attainment, which, in turn, has also led to lower levels of income inequality. Entering an apprenticeship within the dual system in Germany could therefore also be interpreted as a *non-resistant*, active choice supported by a young person's working-class culture, rather than as a push in a predetermined direction, either conscious or unconscious to the individual, or as a reproductive act of resistance.

In addition to these empirical critiques of Willis's main ideas of reproduction through resistance, McFadden (1995) provides a succinct review of more theoretical-ideological criticisms levelled at Willis's work: its male-oriented ethnography; its romanticized notion of (male) working-class culture; its sense of deep cultural oppression and reproduction (despite Willis's claims to overcome the determinism inherent in neo-Marxist theories like Bowles and Gintis's correspondence thesis); its neglect of counter-cultural behaviour by non-working-class students; and a general suspicion about Willis's claim that the lads' behaviour constitutes conscious acts of resistance, rather than ritual clowning and organized trouble making.[19]

For instance, Furlong (1991, 297) suggests that observed resistance in educational settings is not a rejection of abstract social structures, as Willis would have it, but a response to teachers, curriculum, discipline, and other day to day "nuisances" of schooling. Others have objected to Willis's elevation of a small group of working-class students' behaviour as representative of class agency. Rejecting Willis's insistence that ordinary working-class kids' relative quiescence in school is evidence of blind conformism, Brown (1987, 3) suggests that the charge of conformism is too deterministic and oversocialized and is inadequate for understanding the way in which ordinary kids experience school:

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[19] McFadden refers to a number of key studies that have critically engaged with Willis's landmark ethnography of working-class lads in an English school. These works have criticized his male-oriented ethnography (McRobbie 1991), a romanticized notion of male working-class culture (Walker 1988), a misinterpretation of loutish ritual and clowning (McLaren 1993) or merely organized trouble (Graham and Jardine 1990) as acts of working-class resistance.

> The way the ordinary kids responded to school was as much a working-class cultural response as the one which led to its rejection. The ordinary kids' willingness to make an effort in school, albeit limited, was part of an authentic attempt to maintain command of their own lives; to maintain a sense of personal dignity and respect in circumstances where they were not academically successful; and, on their own terms, to enhance their chances of making a working-class career when they left school.

Brown's comments are not only a response to Willis's resistance thesis, but also to earlier research by Hargreaves (1967), who argues that educational failure of working-class youth is a consequence of streaming and different treatment by teachers in the modern secondary school. Students placed into lower streams, due to their inability to succeed in terms of middle-class definitions of educational achievement, compensate with the development of an anti-school attitude. Unlike Willis's account, Hargreaves' explanation is much closer to the neo-Marxist, determinist view of the role of education in the reproduction of class positions discussed previously, although his work predates the publication of Bowles and Gintis's *Schooling in Capitalist America* by nearly 10 years. Willis's explanation, of course, does not treat the development of a counter-school culture as a consequence of educational failure, but as its cause (Brown 1987, 23).

Brown's review of the essential differences between Hargreaves' and Willis's account of working-class students' failure at school corresponds with a general criticism of overly functionalist (Hargreaves) and overly culturalist (Willis) explanations of this phenomenon. Both explanations, according to Brown, are fraught with problems. Willis restricts his analysis to a minority of non-conformists, while ignoring the majority of conforming working-class students. Hargreaves has no explanations for the causes of different levels of educational attainment within the group of working-class students, as clearly not all of them end up in the lowest streams.

Some of the issues central to these critiques of resistance theory were taken up by rational choice theorists who introduced a very different way of explaining youth's behaviour both in high school and in the transitions from high school to employment or post-secondary education.

Rational Choice

Explaining the inadequacies of both status attainment and human capital approaches to understanding the life course experiences of a cohort of 1973 Ontario high school graduates, Anisef et al. (2000) adopt a view that considers agency and structure as implicated in one another, but in an essentially non-determinist way. Borrowing from the life course literature, they suggest that

> While various forms of 'capital' may arise from the reproduction of social class and other aspects of social background, this capital must be taken up and 'invested' by individuals. In this sense, the individual as an agent decides how her capital is to be employed, and 'invests' in the context of a biographical transition. (ibid., 17)

This notion of investing capital, no matter how limited it may be, might explain why Anisef et al. found that lower-class youth who attained higher education upon graduation from high school found success in the labour market. It might also explain why, generally, the life course experiences of the cohort under investigation varied enormously. Both findings give credence to the argument that "individual factors are important when it comes to adapting to the many transition experiences in moving from adolescence to adulthood" (ibid., 258). Although they are not working in the rational choice tradition, Anisef et al's use of the investment metaphor suggests a notion of rational choice in the transition processes to which I will turn next.

Boudon (1974), and more recently Goldthorpe (1996), have both looked at rational choice as a basis for social stratification and inequality. Boudon (1974) distinguishes between the primary and secondary effects of social stratification. While the primary effects are differences in academic ability generated by family background, secondary effects are the educational choices made by young people and their parents at particular key decision-making points. Acting rationally, people attempt to maximize the utility of their educational decisions based on costs, expected benefits, and the probability of success of various alternatives. As success is defined in terms of subsequent return on the initial investment in education, and as this definition is dependent on one's income and SES, individuals from different class locations arrive at different conclusions:

> As a result of economic inequality in society, different social locations give rise to different costs, benefits and probabilities of success. It is the rational evaluation of these, rather than class cultural factors, which generate class differences in transition propensities. (Hatcher 1998, 10)

There are a number of rational considerations operating at this level. First, and most obviously, working-class families' participation in education comes at a higher relative cost, giving their economic disadvantages compared to middle or upper-class families. Leaving school earlier or not participating in higher post-secondary education therefore may be a rational decision. Second, the more affluent middle classes not only have better means to finance further education, they also have more to lose by not going on to higher education. Not taking advantage of higher education options may lead to social demotion for middle-class kids, whereas working-class youth can maintain their class position even without great investment in education (ibid., 10). What these rational decisions lead to, of course, is an effective reproduction of class location.

More recently, Goldthorpe (1996) has built on Boudon's notion of rational choice by explaining why, despite the massive expansion of educational opportunities in most industrialized countries, class differences in participation have remained essentially the same. Unlike social stratification researchers who see these persisting inequalities as the result of structural forces, Goldthorpe argues that there has been little change in these inequalities because there has been little change in the cost-benefit balances for members of different classes. For members of the working class, unsuccessful participation in higher education would be far more costly than for members of a family with a higher SES. Vocational programs or courses, from a cost-benefit perspective, provide a much safer protection against unemployment or unstable, unskilled labour.[20] Goldthorpe concludes by proposing a weak version of rational choice theory, in which individuals choose courses of action based on some assessment of probable costs and benefits rather than "unthinkingly following social norms or giving unreflecting expression to cultural values" (ibid., 485).

In a large quantitative study of Italian youth and their educational choices, entitled *Were They Pushed or Did They Jump*, Gambetta (1987) asked whether educational decisions are the result of a "push from behind" (i.e., structural determinants) or a "pull from the front" (decisions as a result of intentional, rational behaviour). Leaning heavily on various notions of rational choice, Gambetta (ibid., 186) found that:

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[20] Goldthorpe supports his argument by suggesting that, for the same reason, the male-female gap has narrowed, because investment in higher education is seen as paying off in the labour market by women to a degree that investment in higher education by working-class children is not guaranteed.

> Subjects tend to evaluate rationally the various elements for making educational decisions, which include economic constraints, personal academic ability and expected labour market benefits. This process of evaluation takes place on the basis of their personal preferences and life-plans, though, are in turn 'distorted' by specific class biases which act as weights that subjects sub-intentionally apply to the elements of their rational evaluation.

Gambetta did find results that mirror those of other aggregate stratification studies discussed earlier. However, he also noted that, while working-class children are more likely to leave the education system at a relatively early stage, those who did stay were more likely to go to university than children with higher socio-economic backgrounds. Reviewing Gambetta's study,[21] Giddens (1984, 306-307) interprets these findings as evidence of a higher level of commitment by working-class families to values that, albeit culturally alien to them, are associated with far greater material costs than for higher-class families. While it appears that higher-class families more or less automatically keep their children in the education system beyond the ordinary school-leaving age, working-class parents only do so for particular reasons. Ultimately, however, both in the "normal" cases of early working-class school leavers, and in the cases described above, families engage in forms of rational choice based on cost-benefit assumptions. Answering his initial question about whether the young people he studied were pushed or whether they jumped, Gambetta (1987, 187) concludes that

> They jumped as much as they could and as much as they perceived it was worth jumping. The trouble, though, is that not all children can jump to the same extent and the number of pushes they receive in several directions, shaping their opportunities as well as preferences, varies tremendously in society.

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[21] Giddens' review of Gambetta's study was based on Gambetta's dissertation, which was completed in 1982. This explains Giddens' ability to review research three years prior to its official publication.

Unlike the naïve assumptions of open labour markets and freely accessible education systems in the earlier discussed human capital theory, rational choice theories such as those proposed by Boudon and Goldthorpe are intended to explain persisting social inequalities. However, their insistence on rational decisions exclusively based on cost-benefit calculations finds little resonance with most people's everyday experiences. For instance, Brown's (1987) study of working-class secondary students' aspirations shows how non-monetary rewards, like interesting work, good workmates and good working conditions, are more important to decision making than an understanding of the cost-benefit relation of possible alternatives. And the perceptions of these rewards are strongly influenced by the social and cultural conditions in an individual's life. Just as social stratification studies tend to overemphasize the constraining nature of structural forces, the study of high school students' agency in their educational decision-making process has to be informed by an understanding of the structural, institutional, and cultural conditions that shape this agency. Giddens (1984, 310) suggests that:

> One could investigate how the actors' motives and processes of reasoning have been influenced or shaped by the factors in their upbringing and prior experiences and how those factors have in turn been influenced by general institutional features of the wider society. … Structural constraints, in other words, always operate via agents' motives and reasons, establishing (often in diffuse and convoluted ways) conditions and consequences affecting options open to others, and what they want from whatever options they have.

Giddens' own structuration theory provides a possible framework for the investigation of individual agency within specific structural contexts.

Giddens' Structuration Theory

The theoretical debates outlined above tend to focus on how much educational choice is attributed to individuals or to what extent school-work transitions are predetermined by social structures. This dialectical relationship between agency and structure assumes central importance in Giddens' structuration theory. Giddens believes that the structure-agency dualism characteristic of most social theory is a false dichotomy, as social action and social structures presuppose and require one another. Rather than theorizing a dualism, Giddens speaks about the duality of structure (Giddens 1984). In other words, Giddens calls for a reinterpretation of structures as both constraining and enabling, just as language restricts us in what we can say while actually enabling us to say something in the first place (Craib 1992). Structure and action are "mutually constituted through the transformative and replicative effects of social activity" (Layder, Ashton and Sung 1991, 447).

According to Giddens, sociology has been unable to theorize a reflexive, acting person, conceptualized as a knowledgeable agent who can justify his or her actions and reflexively produce and reproduce his or her social life (Giddens 1979). For Giddens, a conception of the agent must involve an active subject situated in time and space, thus linking agency to social structure. Social phenomena are actively produced and reproduced by individuals, grounded in ontological security, practical consciousness, rules, resources, and social routines. Yet, while these phenomena are actively produced and reproduced, they take on the reality of social structures that become to some degree external to social interaction. It would be misguided, however, to reify these social structures, as has been the case with most social theory. For Giddens, agency and structure are inseparable and enable and constrain one another. And while some structures which people create may be more limiting than others, Giddens argues that there are few situations in which behaviour is completely determined.

However, Giddens concedes that there are restrictions on the reflexive agent. While institutional structures are created through agency as outlined above, the time-space stretch of modern institutions means that the activities of many individuals occur within contexts that they cannot control. Similarly, different access to resources, and thus power, may limit some agents' freedom of action. Finally, individuals are not always capable of fully and reflexively comprehending the social relations in which their actions occur.

I wish to briefly return to Willis's study of working-class lads' resistance to the middle-class values of education, as Giddens' himself discusses Willis in *The Constitution of Society* (1984). Perhaps structuration theory has some applicability to the study of youth transitions. Giddens (ibid., 293) summarizes Willis's key findings as follows:

> [Willis's study] is … an attempt to indicate how the activities of 'the lads', within a restricted context, contribute to the reproduction of larger institutional forms. Willis' study is unusual, compared with a great deal of social research, because he stresses that 'social forces' operate *through* agents' reasons and because his examination of social reproduction makes no appeal at all to functionalist concepts (my emphasis).

Giddens applauds Willis for not conceptualizing reproduction in functionalist terms and for not arguing that the education system shapes workers according to the needs of industrial capitalism. Instead, Willis proposes that the lads' oppositional behaviour is purposeful action. According to Giddens (ibid., 294), the lads' action is

> carried on in an intentional way, for certain reasons, within conditions of bounded knowledgeability. ... The actors have reasons for what they do, and what they do has certain specifiable consequences which they do not intend.

Reinterpreting Willis's findings within a structuration framework that recognizes a duality of structures, Giddens argues that the purposive action of the lads is nevertheless informed, or bound by the social space they inhabit. In other words, their oppositional and rebellious behaviour at school draws upon their working-class environment at home, in the streets, in the pubs, and so on. Giddens suggests that "the neighbourhood and the streets provide symbolic forms of youth culture that are also in a more direct way the source of themes articulated in the counter-school culture" (ibid., 299). Yet, this bounded knowledgeability, as Giddens calls it, does not operate behind the lads' backs. On the contrary, they draw upon this knowledge to "see through" or penetrate the middle-class ethic of social mobility through educational attainment. They claim insights into the true character of work (and the real world) that they feel are denied to the conformist working-class children who have bought into the illusion of bettering themselves through hard work at school. The duality of structure is thus established through the purposive action of the lads, which is nevertheless bound by their social space and knowledge. It is only through these actions, however, that structural properties are ultimately established. Or, in Giddens' words:

> Structures exist only in their instantiation in the knowledgeable activities of situated human subjects, which reproduce them as structural properties of social systems embedded in spans of time and space. (ibid., 304)

Despite Giddens' endorsement of Willis's *Learning to Labour*, it is worth noting that this specific interpretation of a certain set of structural properties becoming real and being reproduced can still be challenged by many of the criticisms of Willis's study. Critiques suggest an overly romanticized version of male working-class resistance and the potential misinterpretation of youthful rebelliousness as an expression of working-class resistance. Given the most serious criticism that Willis failed to include the more conformist behaviours and attitudes of the majority of working-class kids in his thesis, it is tempting to suggest that it is not the lads and their behaviour that have given working-class, counter-cultural structures existence, but Willis (and Giddens) themselves.

Layder, Ashton and Sung (1991) try to link Giddens' theorizing with empirical research on the transition from school to work.[22] Their analysis conceptualizes the youth labour market as a series of segments, from an upper managerial-professional segment to a lower semi-skilled and unskilled segment. Their survey results show that overall, structural variables (e.g., social class of parents, sex, and local labour market and opportunity structures) play a more important role for youth entering jobs in the middle and lower segments, while individual variables are more powerful in influencing the probability of entry into the higher segment, leading the authors to the conclusion that individuals' capacity for agency, or transformative capacity, varies according to their loci within society (ibid., 459). Ultimately, Layder et al. conclude that while agency and structure are indeed interdependent and deeply implicated in each other, they do remain partly autonomous and separable domains, thus limiting the empirical applicability of Giddens' structuration theory (ibid., 461).

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[22] The authors acknowledge that Giddens himself is reluctant to commit to the idea of an empirical test of structuration theory because of the presumed inappropriateness of the positivist model of social science upon which the concept of empirical test rests. Nevertheless, the authors believe that "just as empirical evidence is meaningless without some theoretical means of ordering it, so theory … is intrinsically related to the empirical world through its attempt to represent that world (Layder, Ashton and Sung 1991).

Different cultural contexts may herald even stronger structural constraints. For instance, early streaming in German elementary schools already places agents into entirely different structural positions from which they have to embark on their transition process. Granted, within these positions, individuals do negotiate their transition processes, but their various options are clearly constrained by structural variables defined by the type of school into which they were streamed.

While not rejecting the applicability of structuration theory to school-work transitions research, Layder et al (1991) remain concerned about the practical problems of turning elusive concepts like rules, social relations, practical consciousness, and ontological security into manageable empirical categories. However, some more recent studies have tried to conceptualize transition processes as involving reflexive and acting individuals, as Giddens would suggest, but whose agency is nevertheless constrained by very real structural conditions that exist *de facto*, rather than as outcomes of individuals' actions. Theoretically, this research is strongly informed by Beck's (1986, 1990) notion of individualization within a risk society, or late modernity.

Individualization, Risk Society and Late Modernity

In a review of recent youth transitions studies, Wyn and Dwyer (1999) highlight the increasingly important notion of agency and choice in a society in which traditional structural constraints have, to some degree, lost their predictive significance in young people's lives. There is little doubt that the experiences of young people making the transition into adulthood are quite different now than they were 20 years ago. Many of these changes are direct results of labour market restructuring, workplace reorganizations, and changing educational demand. As a consequence, all young people regardless of social background, gender, or race are faced with increased uncertainty and risk (Furlong and Cartmel 1997, 1).

Furlong and Cartmel (ibid.) suggest that we have moved from a Fordist social structure to a post-Fordist society.[23] While Fordism was characterized by school-work transitions that were generally short, stable, and predictable, and led to relatively standardized and homogenous life experiences, transitions in a post-Fordist society have become more protracted, increasingly fragmented, and less predictable. The authors describe a commodification trend, whereby education is treated as a consumer product offering a choice of schools and courses. For many young people this has meant an increasing range of educational options, associated with increased life course risks. Alberta's RAP is an example of a program that adds another alternative to already opaque transition processes. Yet, problems in the labour market remain largely un-addressed.

While these labour market trends emphasize the structural dimensions of school-work transitions, even within late modernity,[24] theorists like Beck (1986, 1990) and Giddens (1990) point to the importance of how individuals actively negotiate the risks and uncertainties that are presented to them through an increasing range of possibilities. As school-work transition patterns become less predictable, young people need to constantly engage in a reflexive confrontation with the likely consequences of their choices and actions. Beck's theoretical concept is that of the risk society, which, when applied to the problems of school-work transitions, suggests that the dissolution of traditional structural elements of industrial society, such as class, gender, or ethnicity, has led to more uncertain, fragmented, and ultimately individualized (as opposed to structurally determined) transition processes (Beck 1986, 1990). Beck has also used the metaphor of the *elevator effect* (Beck 1986, 124-130) to describe how the rising absolute level of education has loosened traditional class bonds (Gellert 1996).

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[23] Fordism is based on mass production and mass consumption. Post-Fordism is characterized by flexibility (Burrows and Loader 1994). At the global level, this flexibility can be seen in the deregulation of international markets (most notably financial markets). In industry, flexibility means a move away from mass production to batch production of diversified products, small-scale (service) industries and flexible production with different employment relationships. We see the polarization between core and periphery jobs, skilled and unskilled work, a growth of non-standard employment, etc. (Pierson 1998).

[24] In their essence, conditions of late modernity suggest that traditional structural elements (e.g., class, gender, ethnicity, location) have become less deterministic and that, correspondingly, an increasing range of alternative courses of action have opened up for individuals. This has a number of consequences. Individuals need to engage more reflexively with their social environment in order to make sense of the increased range of alternatives they now face. In turn, this increase in alternatives opens up chances of social mobility, but also increases risk (for instance, of choosing badly from a greater range of options). Unlike postmodern or post-structuralist theories of society, however, social structures continue to shape individuals' life courses (Beck 1986, 1990; Giddens 1990).

Drawing on Beck's concepts, and relying on evidence from a Dutch youth transitions study, du Bois-Reymond (1998) makes the distinction between choice and normal biographies. The latter are characterized by traditional, pre-determined, sequential stages of development into adulthood, while the former are characterized by increased options, negotiation, and tension between choice and coercion. The increasing range of alternatives offered in late modernity, which leads to choice biographies, requires a reflexive engagement of individuals with these options. Evans and Heinz (1995) argue that transitions from school to work no longer rely on traditional socializing agencies such as family and school. Instead, the authors conclude that

> the extent to which young people have succeeded in developing longer term occupational goals depends not only on their past socialization in family and school, but also to a large degree on the way their identity formation was linked to challenge and rewarding experience in the passage to employment itself. (ibid., 7)

Strategic risk taking, then, is considered a successful expression of this individualization of the transition process. However, Evans and Heinz (ibid.) admit that in cases where structural constraints, such as the lack of material or social resources, impede strategic risk taking, passive individualization ultimately may result in harmful "wait-and-see" transition patterns. Thus, institutional and market agencies continue to have structuring effects on the choices and activities of young people. Furthermore, the authors acknowledge that "risk is unevenly distributed according to location in the social structure, with young people in positions of disadvantage losing out heavily" (ibid., 10).

Official statistics (OECD 2000; Statistics Canada 2000a) and other smaller-scale studies (Andres et al. 1999; Davies 1999; Shavit and Blossfeld 1993) certainly indicate that Beck's notion of decreasing structural influences may, at least in the case of school-work transition processes, be somewhat exaggerated. Structural factors such as family background, gender, ethnicity, education systems, or labour market conditions continue to form possibilities and constraints that may provide new choices and opportunities for self-realization for some while marginalizing others. While the plethora of provincial and federal youth employment initiatives certainly suggests that young people have a greater range of educational and occupational choices, which in turn places a greater emphasis on the study of agency, it remains important to consider the structural constraints that frame the school-work transitions process.

Concurrent with the North American literature on credentialism (Collins 1977, Murphy 1988, 1994), German researchers have found little change in social inequality, despite massive expansion of the education system (Köhler 1992; Solga and Wagner 2001). Solga and Wagner conclude that the expansion of Germany's education system was a failure in terms of reducing social inequality, as the differential chances for educational attainment for children of different social backgrounds merely stabilized at a higher level (Solga and Wagner 2001, 108). However, the authors argue this has had a particularly negative impact on the declining number of young people who remain at the lowest secondary school level (*Hauptschule*). First, it is likely that these children have remained at the *Hauptschule* level because of their disadvantaged family SES. Second, the educational and social milieu of the *Hauptschule* intensifies this disadvantage in that the attitudes of schoolmates and teachers, and the restrictive nature of curriculum, circumscribe the development of higher aspirations (ibid., p. 111). In other words, despite an increasing range of educational options and a supposedly more open secondary education system, structural disadvantages continue to constrain the potential for reflexive risk taking.

Fully aware of the tensions between theoretical concepts that suggest a breaking down of traditional structural dimensions like class, gender, race, and locality, and empirical evidence to the contrary, Furlong and Cartmel (1997, 109) suggest that life in a risk society, or late modernity, revolves around what they call an epistemological fallacy:

> The paradox of late modernity is that although the collective foundations of social life have become more obscure, they continue to provide powerful frameworks which constrain young people's experiences and life chances.

The central conundrum is that while a general trend of individualization can be observed in that collective social identities (e.g., social class) have lost some significance for the basis of agency, such identities continue to significantly shape life chances and outcomes.

Rudd and Evans (1998) also recognize the influence of class, gender, race, and locality on youth transitions, but nevertheless argue that not enough has been done to "deconstruct individualized aspects of youth transitions" (ibid., 60). They claim that

> … all young people are making choices every day and some of these choices will significantly affect their educational and employment careers. … The almost deterministic macro-sociological perspective of *propulsion* into career trajectories and their associated occupational outcomes, with very little control over these processes on the part of the young people themselves, involves a rather minimalist view of the input which young people can put into these processes. … More work needs to be done to discover and account for the factors which encourage a sense of agency and a belief in choice as important subjective dimensions in young people's attitudes. (ibid., 60-61, emphasis in original)

However, in order to avoid the epistemological fallacy of reflexive modernity, some recent youth transitions studies have used a notion of agency in which young people attach considerable importance to individual efforts, but which also takes into account young people's very own understanding of the structural dimensions that might circumscribe these efforts. These conceptualizations of agency have been termed *structured individualization* (e.g., Roberts, Clark, and Wallace 1994; Rudd and Evans 1989) or *bounded agency*, which Evans (2002, 248) describes as follows:

> A temporally embedded process of social engagement in which past habits and routines are contextualized and future possibilities envisaged within the contingencies of the present moment, to arrive at a metaphor for socially situated agency, influenced but not determined by structures and emphasizing internalized understandings and frameworks as well as external actions.

Although derived from a specific reading of Beck's individualization thesis, tempered by a consideration of its inherent epistemological fallacy, Evan has arrived at a definition of agency at the core of which lies an understanding of individual choice as informed by "past habits and routines" and in which "future possibilities are envisaged within the contingencies of the present moment"—in other words, a definition that is actually very reminiscent of Bourdieu's notions of habitus and cultural capital.

Bourdieu's Theory of Practice

As I have shown throughout this chapter, regardless of its theoretical or ideological underpinnings, the empirical research literature points to significant differences between the career paths of young people from different socio-economic backgrounds. Hodkinson (1998), in a review of British school-work transitions research, details how entry into specific career trajectories is largely dependent on levels of education by the age of 16, which in turn are strongly influenced by social class. Opportunity structures in the youth labour market, as well as gender, ethnicity, and geographical location, are presented as further determining factors. In this tradition, little agency is attributed to the young person embarking on his or her career path. In contrast, Hodkinson's own qualitative, longitudinal research project, following British youth from school into training programs and the workplace, identified significant levels of agency. These were framed, however, by structural elements. Hodkinson describes the career transitions of these young people as reflecting active and pragmatic decision making, generally on an informed, rational basis. These decisions, however, are grounded in previous experiences and certain pre-existing dispositions toward specific career options, similar to Evans' concept of bounded agency. Unable to neatly categorize these results on either end of the agency-structure continuum, Hodkinson draws on Bourdieu's concept of habitus to explain how these young people have developed dispositions through interaction with others and the culture in which they live (ibid., 96-97). Like Giddens, Bourdieu is concerned with the relationship between structure and agency. The two theorists are different, however, in that Giddens places a stronger emphasis on "the intelligence of people in the context of a modern, reflexive world" (Tucker 1998, 71), whereas Bourdieu maintains that social relations remain largely opaque to individuals. In Bourdieu's theory, the concepts of capital, habitus and field are central to determine action, or practice. Since Bourdieu's theorizing becomes central to my analysis of the actions and experiences of youth apprentices, I will discuss his concepts in some detail.

Capital

According to Bourdieu, capital is defined as the set of actually usable resources and powers an individual possesses and can take the form of economic, cultural, social and symbolic capital. Bourdieu defines capital as "accumulated labour (in its materialized form or its 'incorporated,' embodied, form) which, when appropriated on a private, i.e., exclusive, basis by agents or groups of agents, enables them to appropriate social energy in the form of reified or living labour" (Bourdieu 1986, 241). Capital is best understood as resources determining social relations of power. These resources may be social, cultural, political, or even religious in origin (Swartz 1997, 75), and can be accumulated, converted, and strategically used to change or maintain social relations.

More concretely, economic capital refers to the financial resources at one's disposal, whereas social capital represents an individual's network of social resources (although, in Bourdieu's work, nothing is ever quite as simple as that). Cultural capital is a more complex phenomenon, central to Bourdieu's theory of reproduction of inequality through education (Bourdieu and Passeron 1977). In North American educational research, cultural capital calls attention to the ways in which cultural resources rooted in social origin, such as language ability, knowledge, and tastes, are linked to educational and occupational aspirations and attainment. Breaking with a Marxist tradition that treats culture as a "superstructural derivative of underlying economic factors" (Swartz 1997, 288), Bourdieu argues that culture is a power resource in its own right. In this respect, Bourdieu is able to explain how elements of the school culture and curriculum favour the children of "cultured" middle- and upper-class families, while alienating working-class children who do not see their experiences and knowledge reflected in curriculum.[25] Bourdieu himself has at times expanded the notion of cultural capital to informational capital, to encompass a greater range of culture and knowledge (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992, 119).

Field

While habitus is mostly concerned with embodied structures in praxis, field is defined as a network or configuration of objective relations, including individuals, institutions and other groupings that exist in structural relation to each other (Grenfell and James 1998, 16). Bourdieu says that "to think in terms of field is to *think relationally*" (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992, 96, emphasis in original) and defines a field as "a network, or a configuration, of objective relations between positions" (ibid., 97). He often uses the analogy of the game to provide a more intuitive notion of field, although unlike a game, a field has not been deliberately created and it follows rules and regularities that are not explicit or codified (ibid., 98). Following is an uncharacteristically (for Bourdieu) lucid description of how to understand the concept of field within the game analogy:

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[25] This argument can, of course, be extended beyond class issues, to include gender, race and ethnicity. In Canada, for instance, low levels of educational attainment of aboriginal students are often traced to the existence of a white, middle-class school curriculum and culture (Wotherspoon 1998).

> Thus we have stakes (*enjeux*) which are for the most part the product of the competition between players. We have an *investment in the game*, *illusio* (from ludus, the game): players are taken in by the game, they oppose one another, sometimes with ferocity, only to the extent that they concur in their belief (*doxa*) in the game and its stakes; they grant these a recognition that escapes questioning. Players agree, by the mere fact of playing, and not by way of a "contract," that the game is worth playing, that it is "worth the candle," and this *collusion* is the very basis of their competition. We also have *trump cards*, that is, master cards whose force varies depending on the game: just as the relative value of cards changes with each game, the hierarchy of the different species of capital (economic, social, cultural, symbolic) varies across the various fields. In other words, there are cards that are varied, efficacious in all fields—these are the fundamental species of capital—but their relative values as trump cards is determined by each field and even by the successive states of the same field. (ibid., 98, emphases in original)

Bourdieu goes on to envision players as possessing a pile of tokens of different colours, each colour representing a given type of capital they hold, which in turn determines players' position and relative power in the game. In other words, the volume and structure of a player's capital determines his or her stances and strategies. But the strategies of a player not only depend on the game's rules and the volume and structure of his/her capital at a given moment, but also on the "*evolution over time* of the volume and structure of his capital, that is, of his social trajectory and of the dispositions (habitus) constituted in the prolonged relations to a definite distribution of objective chances" (ibid., 99, emphasis in original). Players can also increase or convert capital through specific moves and actions in the game, and may, depending on the structure and volume of their capital, be able to change the rules of the game, as witnessed in strategies of players who are able to discredit the capital upon which the force of their opponents rest.

The secondary school system in any given country would certainly constitute a field, as it is comprised of objective structures and relations that, in keeping with the game analogy, have created rules and regularities over time, according to which individuals in the field (e.g., administrators, teachers, parents, students) play the game. The same can be said for the labour market, the post-secondary education system, and for that matter, even the transition processes from school. All can be interpreted as fields in which certain objective structures, relations, rules, and regularities circumscribe players' stances and strategies. In envisioning transitions as a field, and in applying the game analogy, it may also become possible to consolidate notions of individual choice (agency), rational choice, and structural constraints, as players' different forms and volume of capital affect both their position in the game and their strategies. This very notion of the field, and the analogy of the game, also implies struggle, as well as the possibility of change, despite the charge of social determinism often brought against Bourdieu (see below).

Habitus

Habitus ensures the active presence of past experiences within individuals in the forms of schemes of perception, thought and action. Bourdieu has defined habitus as "an acquired system of generative schemes objectively adjusted to the particular conditions in which it is constituted" (Bourdieu 1977, 95). Unlike the constraints posed on individuals in a structural Marxist paradigm, Bourdieu's habitus is the "dialectic of the internalization of externality and externalization of internality" (ibid., 72). In other words, habitus "encapsulates the ways in which a person's beliefs, ideas and preferences are individually subjective but also influenced by the objective social networks and cultural traditions in which that person lives" (Hodkinson and Sparkes 1997, 33). In a strict structural sense, habitus creates dispositions to act, interpret experiences, and think in a certain way. However, Grenfell and James (1998) argue that Bourdieu's concept of habitus goes beyond a simple formulation of biographical determinism as it is actualized through individuals, both consciously and unconsciously. The habitus is considered to "suggest" what people should think and what they should choose to do, but it does not determine action (Ritzer 1996, 405). Grenfell and James write that "habitus derives from an effort to create a methodological construct that will give sufficient representation to the dynamic of structure in social reality as expressed through human knowledge and action" (Grenfell and James 1998, 14).

Bourdieu describes the genesis of his usage of habitus as a response to two opposite ways of envisaging action: 1) the theory of *homo economicus*, as described in rational choice theory, in which action is described as "the deliberate pursuit of a conscious intention, the free project of a conscience positing its own ends and maximizing its utility through rational computation" (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992, 121); and 2) positivist objectivism of action understood as a mechanical reaction. Instead, habitus refers to the "product of *practical sense*, of a socially constituted 'sense of the game'" (ibid., 120-121, emphasis in original).

Bourdieu's concept of habitus has been the target of intense criticism by those who miss in his work an element of resistance, struggle and creative praxis, and who argue that he has an overly deterministic view of human agency (Jenkins 1992). Morrow and Torres (1995) write that individuals' critical consciousness, the potential for resistance, and the role of social movements are treated in a very cursory fashion by Bourdieu (ibid., 190). Other critics have found the concepts of structure, habitus, and dispositions to be too vague. Structure is seen to imply a frustratingly wide range of social arrangements, habitus is deficient as a concept for investigating socialization, while dispositions within the concept of habitus imply conscious action sometimes and unconscious action at other times (Jenkins 1992).

In a lengthy footnote defending Bourdieu against charges of structural determinism, Wacquant (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992) argues that this opposition misrepresents Bourdieu's position. Instead, Bourdieu's emphasis on the conservative, reproductive function of, for example, schooling (Bourdieu and Passeron 1977), has to be viewed against the backdrop of the "idealistic" theoretical climate of the '60s, with its emphasis on achievement and meritocracy, and as a theoretical strategy intended to highlight those functions and processes that are least visible, yet very powerful (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992, 80, f24). Furthermore, as Willis argued, creative praxis and resistance may often lead to an even deeper reproduction of social inequalities. Bourdieu uses Willis's *Learning to Labour* to show how social inequality and the system reproducing this inequality may be structured such that neither resistance nor conformity offer escape:

> For example, to oppose the school system, in the manner of the British working-class "lads" analyzed by Willis, through horseplay, truancy, and delinquency, is to exclude oneself from the school, and increasingly, to lock oneself into one's condition of dominated. On the contrary, to accept assimilation by adopting school culture amounts to being coopted by the institution. The dominated are very often condemned to such dilemmas, to

> choices between two solutions which, each from a certain standpoint, are equally bad ones (ibid., 82).

However, Bourdieu's concepts of field and habitus can account for the possibility of resistance and change.[26] First, the field structures the habitus, which I take to mean that habitus is not a closed concept, as some critics of Bourdieu have argued,[27] but open to change through everyday experiences in different fields. This could help explain why not all working-class students fail at school. Second, the habitus contributes to constituting the field as a "meaningful world, a world endowed with sense and value" (ibid., 127). Bourdieu uses the metaphor of "feeling like a fish in water" when habitus encounters a social world of which it is the product (ibid., 127). Similarly, one may feel like a fish *out* of water when playing a game or moving in a field of which the habitus is not the product. However, Bourdieu is also quick to add that most experiences will confirm habitus, as people are statistically bound to encounter circumstances that agree with their habitus.

Witzel and Zinn (1998) provide a relevant empirical example. In their German longitudinal life course study, these authors work with the assumption that individuals actively engage with their situation in educational or occupational contexts, despite the various claims of more structurally determined reproduction and life course research. They use the term self socialization processes (*Selbstsozialisationsprozesse*) to describe the ways in which individuals deal with and consolidate their own aspirations and the expectations of others (like parents or teachers), and how such processes result in choices and agency which may reproduce or modify social positions (ibid., 28). They use the example of young apprentices moving into potential careers in the manual trades who attempt to compensate for their lack of formal educational credentials by arguing that they have always been more interested in applied, and practical, rather than theoretical work. This leads the authors to suggest that

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[26] Bourdieu himself has never denied the importance of change and resistance and argues that "there is no denying that there exist dispositions to resist; and one of the tasks of sociology is precisely to examine under what conditions these dispositions are socially constituted, effectively triggered, and rendered politically efficient" (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992,. 81).

[27] In an interesting aside, Bourdieu muses about the fact that what he considers an almost banal notion like habitus has caused such negative reactions among some of his critics. He feels that his notion of habitus collides with the "illusion of (intellectual) mastery of oneself that is so deeply ingrained in intellectuals." He adds that "the notion of habitus provokes exasperation, even desperation, I believe, because it threatens the very idea that 'creators' (especially aspiring ones) have of themselves, of their identity, of their 'singularity'" (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992, 132-133).

> The extent to which social structures are reproduced or modified through individual agency depends on how individuals cope with their experiences in the transition to employment (ibid., 28, my translation).

In other words, rather than assuming a deterministic social structure working behind individuals' backs, Witzel and Zinn acknowledge the transformative potential of agency. Unfortunately, their analysis of both qualitative and quantitative longitudinal data yields little that would shed light on the conditions of this transformative agency. As a matter of fact, they come to the conclusion that

> Despite the hypotheses of individualized and accordingly differentiated vocational biographies, our analysis leaves us with the somber realization that social inequalities persist in the transition to employment and the first years of employment and are only partly modified (ibid., 37, my translation).

To appropriate Bourdieu's analogy, these fish stayed in the water.

Applicability to Transitions Research

Bourdieu's concepts of cultural capital, habitus, and field have immediate relevance for the study of the relationships between education, work, and social reproduction. Cultural capital originates within the family domain and has strong influences throughout schooling, especially at times of educational decision making (Andres Bellamy 1993, 140). Some young people enter the education field with higher amounts of cultural capital, inherited through wealth and upbringing in a "cultured" family and environment. This upbringing further increases an individual's cultural capital through the process of habitus formation, in which the rules and expectations of education, learning, and knowledge have already been strongly internalized. However, Andres Bellamy (ibid., 140) stresses that while the influence of social origin, transmitted as cultural and social capital, is relevant to the choice of post-high school destination, action should not be seen as taking the form of a simple, mechanical determinism. Students do have a choice about what they learn and which educational opportunities they follow. Social origin or family background provides individuals with social, cultural, and economic capital that can be invested actively. This concept of investment of social, cultural, and economic capital, understood within Bourdieu's metaphor of the game rather than as rational choice, can then be used to explain why educational and career success is not guaranteed to those with high levels of capital, whereas those with limited levels of capital are still able to invest "shrewdly" enough to overcome their handicap (Andres Bellamy 1994).

Still, those with a habitus that most resembles the dominant culture and values of the school are more likely to be disposed to a certain type of choice or practice (Grenfell and James 1998, 21). According to Swartz (1997, 197), Bourdieu asserts that

> Academic selection is shaped by class-based self-selection. Whether students stay in school or drop out, and the course of study they pursue, depends on their practical expectations of the likelihood that people of their social class will succeed academically. … A child's ambitions and expectations with regard to education and career are the structurally determined products of parental and other reference-group educational experience and cultural life.

While this argument of self-selection is at first fairly convincing, empirical evidence also reveals contrary experiences, particularly when studying the high aspirations but actual limited opportunities of women (e.g., Geller 1996) or minority groups (e.g., Michelson 1990).

I outlined earlier some of the key criticism (and defence) of Bourdieu's habitus concept, namely its supposed social determinism that leaves little room for resistance and creative praxis. Another commonly voiced criticism, and one addressed in this study, is the absence of an explicit and more comparative analysis of the relationship between types of class systems and types of educational systems, as Bourdieu's observations are almost exclusively based on the example of France (Morrow and Torres 1995, 190). If the field and habitus constitute each other mutually, and education systems, labour markets, and systems of school-work transitions are interpreted as fields, then young people's experiences within different school systems and in differently structured labour markets certainly must have strong influences on the formation of their dispositions toward post-secondary education and employment.

Hodkinson and Sparkes (1997) suggest an expansion of Bourdieu's concepts to explain how in a dialectical way new experiences shape and are shaped by an individual's practice. The authors introduce two new concepts into Bourdieu's framework—*schemata* and *horizons for action* (ibid., 34). Schemata are conceptual structures amassed since childhood that help individuals understand their experiences. A repertoire of schemata structures what a person knows of the world and contributes to the dispositions that make up habitus. It is through these schemata that new experiences and information modify dispositions and habitus. The introduction of schemata into Bourdieu's Theory of Practice accounts for the modification of dispositions through educational and labour market experiences as well as contacts with peers, teachers, and colleagues. While these modifications are generally incremental, extreme and powerful anomalous experiences can potentially change a person's habitus radically, an occurrence the authors call a turning point (ibid., 34).

Horizons for action expands Bourdieu's concept of field to conceptualize "the arena within which actions can be taken and decisions made" (ibid., 34). Applied to school-work transitions, a young person's horizon for action is influenced both by his or her habitus as well as the education system and the opportunity structures of the labour market. Their interrelation forms perceptions of what options might be available and appropriate—perceptions that are simultaneously objective and subjective.

Using the concept of horizons for action, Bourdieu's own notion of *hysteresis of habitus* (Bourdieu 1990) can be used to define a situation in which an option is available to an individual, but is rejected as inappropriate. Although their graduation from high school made higher post-secondary education an option within their horizons for action, some participants in a Canadian high school study (Andres Bellamy 1993) decided not to enter university because their current habitus deemed this as inappropriate. However, many of the students in this group kept open the option of returning to post-secondary education should their immediate labour market experiences prove unsatisfactory. That is, new experiences and information gained in the labour market (e.g., a boring job, low pay) are absorbed into the existing schematic framework and cause modification of the habitus—more negative dispositions toward continuation of work and more positive dispositions toward post-secondary education—and the horizon for action.

Summary

This chapter has outlined a range of theoretical traditions and concepts that have been used to explain the complex relationship between social structures and individual agency in the school-work transitions process. I began with a review of human capital theory, which essentially disregards the impact of structural forces, and ascribes educational and occupational attainment, at least at a superficial level, completely to agency. Young people are responsible for increasing their labour market value by increasing their human capital, be that through higher education or workplace training. Human capital theory also functions on the assumption that the labour market is completely transparent and employment opportunities are fairly distributed and widely accessible. Initiatives like Alberta's RAP are essentially designed to provide better linkages into the labour market, particularly for those young people that might otherwise enter the workforce as unskilled labour. Following human capital arguments, the labour market should be receptive to the skills, attitudes, and credentials developed in such a program. Furthermore, young people entering these programs should do so fully aware of these linkages and the value of the credentials/skills they are about to receive for their future careers. Human capital theory does not systematically theorize a relationship between class, gender, and ethnicity, and educational or labour market outcomes. The absence of such a focus implies that young people, whatever their social class, gender and ethnicity, will be found in all the different high school programs and streams, be they academic or vocational (e.g., RAP) in nature.

Empirical evidence clearly supports the basic claim of human capital theory that higher investment in education yields better labour market outcomes. But many studies have also shown a high correlation between socio-economic status and educational attainment, suggesting that occupational attainment is not merely a function of increased human capital, and that access to the means to increase human capital is not equally distributed. This relationship between class and educational attainment is central to neo-Marxist theories, particularly Bowles and Gintis's structurally defined correspondence thesis. Within a strict correspondence framework, my study of RAP participants would expect to find a concentration of working-class youth in apprenticeships, while academic programs would be dominated by children of middle- and upper-class parents. This correspondence between class background and educational attainment or occupational aspirations would remain largely unconscious to the individual. In other words, young people's self-ascribed agency would be contradicted by evidence of structural elements being deterministic in the school-work transitions process.

In contrast, resistance theory, an agency-centred neo-Marxist alternative that emerged in the late '70s, argues that working-class youth actively choose vocational pathways as a reflection of pride in their working-class background and opposition to the dominant middle-class culture in schools. With respect to my study, this would suggest that working-class youth are fully aware of their decisions to join apprenticeship programs and do so to escape the middle-class world of school and to embrace the working-class culture of manual labour. In so doing, they actively reproduce their class position. Although resistance theory is an agency-centred explanation of social inequality, Willis still describes the lads' predictable move into a life of manual labour as "working-class kids *condemn[ing]* themselves to a future of manual work" (Willis 1977, 174, my emphasis). His comment suggests a rather hegemonic and defeatist sense of agency, as well as a rejection of manual labour as the basis for the formation of a positive vocational and class identity.

Giddens' structuration theory was suggested as an alternative approach in that it theorizes relationships in which agency and practice are implicated in one another. According to Giddens' structuration theory, young people in school-work transition processes are intimately involved in various sets of social relations and are called upon to make informed and reflexive decisions regarding their education and career. Structuration theory offers an alternative to both human capital theory's emphasis on rational actors completely free from social structures or social relations, and to structural theories that interpret social structures as strict determinants of choice. However, not only is Giddens himself reluctant to commit his theory to empirical analysis, structuration theory's notions of rules, social relations, practical consciousness, and ontological security are also rather elusive and difficult to integrate into empirical categories and research models.

Since they incorporate notions of structuration, theories of late, reflexive modernity or risk society (e.g., Beck) offer a more satisfactory theoretical basis with which to investigate the relationship between increased individualization and decreased importance of traditional social structures, and their impact on perceived risk and strategic agency. For instance, the introduction of youth apprenticeship programs like RAP in Alberta can be interpreted as enhancing the opportunities for strategic risk taking, as they provide alternative opportunities for high school students to explore career options outside the realm of higher post-secondary education. Similarly, the educational reforms in Germany since the late '60s have opened the doors to higher education for working- and lower-class students.

Strategic risk taking, no doubt, presupposes conscious, informed and active decision making. In my study, this would be expected to be manifested in the reasons young people provide for their participation in different educational and vocational programs. Strategic risk taking should also include a reasonably solid understanding of the consequences of these choices (e.g., the career prospects of a certain trade in which a RAP participant receives training). Furthermore, if structural forces are indeed declining in significance, as is suggested by late modernity theorists, I would also expect that educational and occupational choices would not be significantly framed or constrained by class, gender, or ethnicity.

Bourdieu's theory of practice, like structuration theory, is based on a concern with overcoming the dualism between structure and agency. In contrast to Giddens, however, Bourdieu has developed his theory through empirical analysis and his concepts thus offer a framework for more applied research. Despite criticism that Bourdieu's theory of practice is overly deterministic and suggests, as do neo-Marxist theories, that structural forces act behind an individual's back, Bourdieu's concepts of cultural capital, habitus, and field allow us to place school-work transitions processes in a framework that can account for the formation of dispositions towards certain educational and occupational choices, given a set of structural parameters. The theoretical modifications suggested by Hodkinson and Sparkes add a stronger element of agency within horizons of action. Bourdieu's work is also useful in that he offers "both a philosophical perspective and practical methodology which have attempted to establish an alternative to the extremes of post-modernist subjectivity and positivist objectivity" (Grenfell and James 1998, 2). Grenfell and James argue that Bourdieu's concepts offer an epistemological and methodological "third way" that attempts to go beyond the objectivity-subjectivity or positivist-antipositivist dichotomies. In their opinion, Bourdieu's theory is robust enough to be objective and generalizable, while still accounting for individual, subjective thought and action (ibid., 10).

However, this study is not to be interpreted as a test of Bourdieu's theory of practice. Instead, I use Bourdieu to offer an extension to the concepts of structured individualization and bounded agency, two recent theories of the interplay between structure and agency in school-work transitions discussed in this chapter. I do so by answering a set of research questions (see the following chapter) and by deconstructing participants' narratives in order to open up and document a set of complexities regarding structure, agency, and reproduction of social inequality that have, in my opinion, not received due attention. Finding evidence of non-linear, complex and unpredictable transitions, experienced by young people as complex, changeable, interconnected, and negotiated, Looker and Dwyer (1998, 17-18) have highlighted the need to ask:

> [Q]uestions that deal with changes in plans, and which ask young people why they made the choices they did [in order to] better understand this complex process. ... [Young people] balance what they perceive to be costs and benefits. They recognize supports and barriers. If we, as researchers, fail to ask about these supports, costs, barriers and benefits we will fail to understand

> why many young people make the educational decisions that they do. … A major contribution of more qualitative analyses is that they are able to describe and document some of these complexities.

This is exactly what I want to achieve with my study.

Chapter 4

Methodology, Research Questions, and Participant Profiles

This study aims to investigate the complex relationship between structure and agency during a crucially important stage of the life course. Consequently, I will preface the discussion of the more technical aspects of my research methods with a brief detour into the ontological and epistemological foundations on which the research rests.

Ontology and Epistemology: The Dilemma of Empirically Investigating Structure and Agency

In the introduction to their massive *Handbook of Qualitative Research*, Denzin and Lincoln (2000) provide a critique of both positivist and postpositivist perspectives on social research. They argue that both traditions:

> hold to naïve and critical realist positions concerning reality and its perception. In the positivist version it is contended that there is a reality out there to be studied, captured, and understood, whereas the postpositivists argue that reality can never be fully apprehended, only approximated. Pospositivism relies on multiple methods as a way of capturing as much of reality as possible. (ibid., 9)

Denzin and Lincoln's postmodern critique of positivist and postpositivist research states that modernist assumptions about an empirical world that can be studied objectively are no longer sustainable, as the search for generalizations across cases only obscures the constructed and fragmented nature of experiences in a postmodern world (Seale 1999, 3). Postmodern, constructivist, and poststructural theorists, so the argument continues, reject positivist and postpositivist criteria because they "reproduce only a certain kind of science, a science that silences too many voices" (Denzin and Lincoln 2000, 10). Denzin and Lincoln associate positivist (or even postpositivist) types of research with what they call the second, or modernist phase of qualitative research, which began with the Chicago school and ended around the late '60s. Since then, qualitative research in particular is seen to have been affected by a blurring of genres and disciplines and the crisis tendencies of postmodern, poststructural conditions.

Despite Denzin and Lincoln's sweeping critiques of empirical research in positivist or postpositivist tradition, I join those researchers and theorists who continue to see value in the emancipatory potential of modernity (e.g., Bourdieu, Beck, and Giddens). Rather than interpreting modernist thought and research as a form of social science that silences too many voices, I see this type of research as giving voice without forgetting that these voices speak in a social context. I would therefore characterize my research as a postpositivist study that maintains a commitment to quantification and the search for causal factors, while at the same time incorporating interpretivist concerns with subjectivity and meaning (Seale 1999, 22). Further, I agree with positivists that there is a world that is real and exists independent of individual minds or interpretation. However, this view is tempered by a postpositivist stance recognizing that understanding and perception of this real word is nevertheless individually and socially constructed.

Ontologically, this dissertation is therefore guided by what I will call a moderately constructivist realism, which means that I work with the assumption that individuals construct a version of reality, but that there is nevertheless an objective reality existing outside individuals. Layder (1993, 16) argues that it is the attempt of the realist project in the social sciences to preserve a scientific attitude towards analysis while at the same time recognizing the importance of actors' meanings. This, he argues, can rescue a concern for causal mechanisms that links structure and agency.

The previous literature review and the findings presented in the following chapters lend further credence to these ontological assumptions. In my research, agency was clearly circumscribed by a real social world, which exists outside the experiences of the participants. Although this social world is individually experienced and interpreted, it is nevertheless reflected in similar (constructed) narratives.[28] However, my study did reveal significant differences between participants in Germany and Canada, which I relate to differences in the social and institutional structures of the two countries. The conclusion I draw from these differential findings is that, if institutional arrangements are reflected in agency (and narratives about agency), they must constitute a social reality outside the individual.

Epistemologically, this approach also helps solve the following research conundrum: are interview/focus group responses to be treated as direct reflections of experiences, or as actively constructed narratives ? (Silverman 2001, 113) For instance, youth apprentices in Canada and Germany had already made the decision to enter RAP and the dual system, respectively, and spoke about their decision-making processes, their motivations, and their dispositions after the fact. But Witzel (2001) cautions researchers that individuals engage in a multitude of reconstructions when explaining decisions that took place in the past, and that there is a tendency to reclaim structurally-bound decisions as one's very own. In other words, results of a decision that may not have been entirely independent are recast in a way that makes individuals themselves "the subject of their own biography" (ibid., 351), a problem that may not be evident within either a strictly rational-choice framework, or with non-longitudinal quantitative studies. Thus, with a post-positivist, realist perspective, I can recognize participants' narratives as constructed notions of agency, while still acknowledging such constructed agency in an objective reality.

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[28] For a review of narrative research, see Lieblich et al. (1998).

Methodological Strategies

My study goes beyond previous empirical research by investigating the influence of a combination of structural forces and agency, rather than isolating them. For instance, recent research in the "risk society" tradition has largely underplayed the consistent class inequalities in educational and occupational attainment. At the same time, much of the structural research rejects claims of increased individualization and reflexive agency by showing that social class and educational and occupational attainment continue to be highly correlated, while agency itself is usually not empirically assessed. It is therefore essential to view structure and agency as interrelated and to investigate their effects on school-work transition outcomes simultaneously.

The concepts of habitus and cultural capital, borrowed from Bourdieu, and the notions of structured individualization and bounded agency provide the theoretical basis for my study. An equally important contribution to school-work transitions research, however, is in the study's dual-comparative design and its qualitative methodology. My research design involved both a cross-national comparison between Canada and Germany, and an in-country comparison of young people enrolled in youth apprenticeships with others planning to enrol in post-secondary programs at community colleges or university.

The comparison between youth apprentices and academic-track students was more concerned with the social, cultural, and ideological conditions that may lead to the development of different dispositions toward post-secondary destinations. The Canadian-German comparison was more focused on institutional contexts, and expanded my analysis of the relationship between structural constraints and individual choice. Comparing Germany's traditional apprenticeship program, firmly embedded in its social and economic structure, with Alberta's only very recently introduced Registered Apprenticeship Program (RAP) made it possible to study how young people actively negotiate their post-secondary education transitions, given very different social contexts and boundaries.

The research design and methodology of my study thus expand on previous research in a number of crucial ways. Unlike most of the large longitudinal studies discussed in Chapter 3 (e.g., Anisef et al. 2000 for Canada; Friebel et al. 2000 for Germany), my research provides an in-depth qualitative analysis and deconstruction of young people's own narratives and understanding of their school-work transitions. I am able, therefore, to relate individual accounts of agency to aggregate evidence of social reproduction. And unlike smaller, ethnographic studies like Willis's *Learning to Labour* (1977), my larger comparison between two countries and between young people from different socio-economic backgrounds more clearly highlights the differential impacts of social, cultural, and institutional environments. Both strategies peel back additional layers of complexities in an already complicated relationship.

Research Questions

In this study, I specifically addressed the following key research questions:

1. What are the structural, cultural, and institutional features that shape academic high school education and apprenticeship training in Canada and Germany?

This question has largely been addressed in Chapter 2, which provided an overview of the policy debates that led to the introduction of RAP in Alberta. Chapter 2 discussed how RAP is organized and integrated into the secondary curriculum, and also described the organization and structure of Germany's dual system and its integration into the education system and labour market. Throughout the following chapters, I will continue to explore these institutional differences for their impact on transition processes and to see whether young people themselves perceive these structures as limiting or enabling.

2. Who participates in academic high school programs and who participates in youth apprenticeships in Canada and Germany? Are the participants in the two streams different (e.g., in terms of class, gender, and cultural capital)?

Answering this question will explicitly address issues raised in the social reproduction and status attainment traditions, which I reviewed in Chapter 3. Exploring the relationships of structural factors such as social class, gender, location, and parents' educational and occupational attainment with individuals' dispositions toward post-secondary education and employment will either support or reject reproduction and status attainment theories.

3. To what extent do young people themselves perceive their participation in either academic high school programs or youth apprenticeships as shaped by structural elements or as the result of active choice?

Individuals' own accounts of how they formed dispositions toward specific transitions from high school can help us understand the extent to which they engage in rational choices, as theorized by the different variants of rational choice theories discussed in Chapter 3. Furthermore, both Giddens' structuration theory, and concepts of risk society and late modernity conceptualize individuals as reflexive agents. In other words, individuals, to varying degrees, should have the capability of understanding the institutional and social context in which they live and in which they have to make life course-altering decisions. Depending on their location in the social structure, this very understanding should enable individuals to assess the risks involved with different alternatives and engage in individualized (i.e., non-deterministic) strategic risk taking. Answering question 3 will allow me to evaluate different theoretical ideas that emphasize the capacity of individuals to engage in rational and strategic agency during periods of important transitions.

4. How can young people's own description/evaluation of their agency be interpreted, given the impact of structural elements? How do the findings relate to existing theoretical accounts of school-work transition issues and what alternative theoretical possibilities emerge from the findings?

While questions 1 through 3 require me to interrogate my data, this fourth question involves more interpretation and theory construction. Of greatest interest here is the degree to which participation in youth apprenticeships may be considered an act of resistance toward the mainstream school culture, and to what extent notions of habitus and cultural capital may determine the formation of dispositions toward post-secondary education and employment. However, my data analysis will move beyond a comparative evaluation of these theories and explore alternative ways of explaining the persistence of social inequality without forsaking agency.

5. How do the findings (particularly for Canadian youth apprentices) relate to the goals outlined in policy documents and debates and what potential policy alternatives emerge?

The introduction of RAP was in response to a specific set of policy concerns (see Chapter 2 for a discussion of youth unemployment and the lack of workers in the skilled trades). Obviously, findings from this study will have practical implications relevant to future policy. As far as the goal of improving transitions into employment for young people is concerned, this study addresses questions of participation (who participates and were these participants targeted?), curriculum integration (does participation make high school more meaningful for participants and thus improve the potential for higher educational attainment?), and transition outcomes (are participants' satisfied with the program, do they expect to stay in the trade and gain secure employment, and does participation improve the acquisition of employability skills?).

Data Collection

Between November 2001 and October 2002, I interviewed 105 high school students and youth apprentices in Edmonton, Alberta and in Bremen, Germany, using either one-on-one semi-structured interviews, or focus groups. Schools in Edmonton were selected based on enrolment levels in the Registered Apprenticeship Program (RAP). Participating youth apprentices in Germany were matched, as far as possible, to those in Edmonton based on age and occupation. All but two participants also completed a survey at the end of their interview or focus group. The following sections explain in more detail my selection of specific research sites, my sampling strategies, and my methods of data collection.

Selection of Research Sites

The Edmonton sample was drawn from four different schools, which were chosen because of their above-average enrolment in RAP. Enrolment statistics for RAP were obtained from three sources: 1) Alberta Learning, the ministry responsible for secondary education; 2) Alberta Apprenticeship and Industry Training Board, the body responsible for apprenticeship training in the province; and 3) *Careers: The Next Generation*, a non-profit, private foundation established to promote RAP in schools and the business community. As mentioned in Chapter 2, 980 students participated in the 2000/2001 school year (Alberta Apprenticeship and Industry Training Board 2002). As these 980 students were spread throughout schools in the province, I chose to concentrate data collection in one locality (Edmonton) and a few representative schools within Edmonton.

To gain access to students in Edmonton high schools for research purposes, I had to receive approval at several levels. First, both the Edmonton Public and Edmonton Catholic School Boards have delegated responsibility for a preliminary review of research proposals to the University of Alberta's Faculty of Education. Once the Faculty of Education has approved a research request, it is forwarded to the school boards for further review and approval. Once the proposal passes this stage, a researcher can directly contact principals of schools. Given this complex process, I chose to focus data collection in three representative Edmonton schools and one school in an adjacent community. My choice of research sites was further complicated by a lengthy teacher strike within the Edmonton Public School Board that began just as I was ready to begin fieldwork.

All four sites were chosen for their above-average student enrolment in RAP, but also because they offered a range of other high school programs and options, appealing to a diverse student body. The three Edmonton schools were located in neighbourhoods in the north, west, and south of the city. This further assured that participants were drawn from a variety of Edmonton neighbourhoods and socio-economic backgrounds.

Bremen is a city in northern Germany that is similar in size to Edmonton and is also, like Edmonton, a provincial (*Land*) capital. While Edmonton's industrial base is in the oil and gas industry, Bremen is located just downstream of the North Sea coast and has had an important seaport and shipbuilding industry. However, in recent years Bremen has largely lost its status as a seaport, as bigger freighters are using the more chartable waters of Rotterdam and Hamburg, as well as Bremen's satellite harbour in Bremerhaven. As a result, Bremen's shipbuilding industry has declined in recent years, but the city still has a strong industrial base that includes an assembly plant for Mercedes

Benz automobiles, a world-renowned brewery (Beck's), and production plants for large multinational food brands such as Kellog's and Kraft. Although recently Bremen, as the rest of Germany, has had much higher levels of unemployment than Alberta, the city does have an industrial base that provides apprenticeship-training possibilities in similar or identical trades to the ones I chose to study in Edmonton.

Another important consideration for choosing Bremen as the comparison site was the active academic relationships several members of the Department of Sociology at the University of Alberta have established over the years with researchers at the University of Bremen. Faculty members of the University of Bremen have also been involved for many years in a collaborative research project entitled *Special Collaborative Centre 186: Status Passages and Risks in the Life Course*. They have carried out substantial research on similar topics and have developed contacts with school and apprenticeship board authorities in Bremen that were most useful in organizing my data collection.

Unlike the selection of research sites in Edmonton, which aimed at choosing representative schools, selection of sites in Bremen (at least for youth apprentices) was dictated by the trades I chose to compare. As mentioned in Chapter 2, youth apprentices in Germany's dual system have already left the secondary school system and are employed as full-time workers. They attend vocational school for technical training and classes in general education either once or twice a week, or during a block release for a longer period of time. All apprentices in a specific occupational cluster (e.g., metal trades, construction trades, cooking and hospitality, transportation, beauty trades) attend the same vocational school, regardless of where they live or work. Added to the five vocational schools included in the survey were two *Gymnasien* (grammar schools), chosen to provide a comparison with academic-track high school students in Edmonton. Like the three Edmonton high schools, these two schools were located in different parts of Bremen and had a diverse student body, although diversity in a German *Gymnasium* is limited due to the streaming processes in Germany's tripartite education system (see Chapter 2).

Sampling

My research design involved both a cross-national comparison between Canada and Germany, and an in-country comparison of young people enrolled in youth apprenticeships with others planning to enrol in post-secondary programs at community colleges or university. The comparison within the Edmonton or Bremen groups (i.e., between youth apprentices and academic-track students) was more concerned with the social, cultural, and ideological conditions that may lead to the development of different dispositions toward post-secondary destinations. The comparison between the Edmonton and Bremen groups was more focused on institutional contexts. For both types of comparison, a theoretically-driven, purposive sampling strategy was needed to ensure a range of participants with various backgrounds in each of the four groups. Obtaining diversity in socio-economic background was particularly important, given my interest in social reproduction theory.

This fourfold comparison (see Table 8) led to a rather large sample, compared to many other qualitative studies. However, using focus groups for data collection provided a useful alternative for collecting qualitative (and quantitative) data from this relatively large sample.

Table 8. Sample Matrix

	Edmonton	Bremen
Youth Apprentices	First and Second Year Youth Apprentices (grade 11 and 12) who started their apprenticeship program in high school through RAP.	First, second, and third year apprentices within Germany's dual system.
Academic-Track Students	Grade 11 and 12 high school students enrolled in an academic program.	Grade 11 and 12 *Gymnasium* (grammar school) students.

Edmonton RAP

This group included first and second year youth apprentices (Grade 11 and 12) who had started their apprenticeship program in high school through RAP. Interviews and focus groups were arranged through RAP co-ordinators, and took place in four different high schools in the Edmonton Public (one school), Edmonton Catholic (two schools), and Devon (one school) school districts. The four participating schools were selected because they had above average enrolment in RAP, compared to other schools in the same school districts.

RAP students' work status at the time of interview determined whether they could be included in the study or not. While some RAP students work and attend school at the same time, others work for one semester and attend school the next semester. All RAP participants were drawn from among part-time students or from those who were currently in their school semester. All interviews and focus groups were carried out at the school site, usually in a conference room or an available classroom.

Given these restrictions (i.e., relatively low levels of enrolment and school-workplace scheduling), student availability eventually determined which trades and occupations were covered in the study. However, the range of occupations that eventually resulted from this sampling process, and the fact that the distribution of occupations reflects that of adult apprentices in Alberta, leaves me confident that the participating youth apprentices in my study are reasonably representative of the larger population of RAP participants.

Edmonton Academic

This group included Grade 11 and 12 high school students either already enrolled in academic high school programs leading to university entrance, or planning to enrol in post-secondary programs at the community college or university level. In order to increase comparability between this group and the RAP students, participants were drawn from the same schools as the RAP sample. The inclusion of specific RAP students in interviews and focus groups was essentially determined by their availability at the time of data collection, and the academic group was chosen somewhat similarly. My aim was to include male and female students from different socio-economic backgrounds. I was particularly interested in the participation of students from working-class, or lower socio-economic backgrounds in order to draw comparisons with RAP students of a similar background and to understand why some developed dispositions toward manual labour (RAP students), and others toward more academic post-secondary education.

Principals and teachers assisted in selecting students. Ultimately, this group came to include a mix of female and male students from varied socio-economic and ethnic backgrounds, students in need of upgrading, and students planning to enter community college programs. For ease of reference, I will continue to refer to this group as "academic track" high school students, although this is not literally true. As with the RAP group, all interviews and focus groups were carried out at the high school, on release from classes, during lunch or other free time.

Youth Apprentices in Bremen

This group included first, second, and third year apprentices within Germany's dual system. Unlike RAP in Alberta, Germany's apprenticeship system is no longer part of secondary schooling. German youth apprentices have graduated from one of the three school streams described earlier (Chapter 2), spend the majority of their time in the workplace, and attend occupation-specific vocational schools (*Berufschule)* either once a week or on a block-release basis. As all apprentices in a specific occupational cluster attend the same vocational school for their technical training, I decided to arrange data collection through these schools. Initial contact with schools was facilitated through professors with similar research interests at the University of Bremen. I was allowed to take advantage of connections several researchers had already established with school administrators and teachers as part of a program dealing with drop-out problems in the dual system. Vocational schools and students were selected to match, as closely as possible, the types of occupations held by interview participants in Edmonton. Data collection was carried out at the vocational schools, usually in a classroom or conference room. Given the tight timetable of apprentices during their once-a-week visit to vocational school, I had to rely on teachers' willingness to release students from their classes for a period of time. Given this restriction, I opted for focus groups only for my data collection in Germany, as this method allowed for a larger number of participants with minimal disruption to the schools. While this switch to focus groups was partly motivated by the specific conditions at the schools, I will describe in more detail below how focus groups also emerged as my preferred method to generate richer data.

Academic High School Students in Bremen

This group included Grade 11 and 12 *Gymnasium* (grammar school) students. As outlined previously, Germany has no comprehensive schools and youth apprentices have already left the secondary school system by the time they start their apprenticeship. This makes comparison a little more difficult. However, schools and students were selected to approximate the types of schools included in Edmonton and to ensure that participants came from a cross-section of socio-economic backgrounds. As with vocational schools, contacts with teachers and principals were facilitated through researchers at the University of Bremen. Furthermore, to be methodologically consistent with the data collection for German apprentices, only focus groups were used. They were carried out at the schools, with students released from class for the requested period of time (usually about 60 to 90 minutes).

This comparative, four-cell sampling strategy resulted in a total sample of 105 participants. Of these, 65 were youth apprentices, and 40 were academic-track high school students. Fifty-two were interviewed in Edmonton and 53 in Bremen (see Table 9 below). Twenty-nine of the 52 Edmonton participants were youth apprentices in RAP, and 23 were academic students. In Germany, 36 of the 53 participants were youth apprentices in the dual system, and 17 were academic students in grammar schools (*Gymnasium*). Table 9 below also shows the distribution of participants contacted via individual interviews and those who participated in focus groups.

Table 9: Study Participants by Location, Type of Program, and Data Collection Method

	Edmonton	Bremen	Total
Youth Apprentices	18 individual interviews 3 Focus groups (11) 2 groups @ 4 1 group @ 3 N=29	No individual interviews 7 Focus Groups 6 groups @ 5; 1 group @ 6 N= 36	N= 65
Academic Track	5 individual interviews 3 Focus Groups (18) 1 group @5 1 group @ 6 1 group @ 7 N= 23	No individual interviews 3 Focus Groups 2 groups @ 6 1 group @ 5 N= 17	N= 40
Total	N= 52	N= 53	N= 105

Data Collection Strategies

My ontological and epistemological assumptions and my set of research questions suggest the benefit of using mixed methods to investigate the complicated interrelationships between structure and agency in the transitions from high school. A quantitative survey allowed a more systemic analysis of reproductive patterns, which was necessary for supporting or rejecting reproduction and status attainment theory. Interviews and focus groups, in contrast, allowed an in-depth look at roles individuals themselves played in the transition processes. In other words, the use of both quantitative and qualitative measures allowed me to address both sides of the structure-agency debate. Furthermore, it also allowed me to triangulate data for greater reliability and to identify themes and patterns that one single approach might have overlooked.

Interviews and Focus Groups

The main purpose of this study was to explain how both structure and agency are implicated in the reproduction of social inequality. As I will discuss below, I used a survey to provide an aggregate assessment of reproduction of inequality. In order to explore the role of agency in these reproductive processes, it was important to engage with participants' at an in-depth, individual level. I approached this study with an image of high school students and youth apprentices, not as mere dupes being streamed, tracked, and sent off on predetermined life course paths, but as active individuals who make choices, who have some form of understanding how these choices may be affected by their social origin, and who engage in a construction and re-construction of the social reality in which they live. Therefore, qualitative interviewing methods were the logical choice to elicit participants' experiences and how they make sense of their dispositions and choices. Although guided by existing theories of structural and cultural reproduction, the purpose of this study was still exploratory, which limited the applicability of strictly quantitative methods. Furthermore, a large-scale quantitative study would have been a logistical impossibility, given the wide distribution of only a few RAP students across all high schools in Alberta and the complex process of receiving permission through the university, school boards, and individual schools.[29]

I chose to use a mix of individual semi-structured interviews and focus groups, with a flexible interview guide (see Appendix G). Although the interview guide was designed to give participants as much control over the interview process as possible (i.e., it was not meant to be followed slavishly, in the order in which the questions were originally written), it served as a tool to ensure that all interviews covered the same range of questions, themes, and issues. Participants were asked to reflect on their dispositions and motivations for joining RAP (in the case of Edmonton youth apprentices) or for the reasons behind their post-secondary education plans (in the case of academic-track high school students). These sets of questions allowed participants to construct narratives of agency and independence, if they so chose. The interview then proceeded to ask about the influence of parents, siblings, peers, teachers, and others on the formation of these dispositions. These influences were assessed both directly (e.g., participants' own accounts of discussions with parents), and indirectly. Questions about indirect influences asked about the overall relationships with parents, family life, and attitudes about schooling and working. Through this relatively wide set of questions, asked in an open format, it was possible to analyze consistencies and inconsistencies in individuals' accounts of agency and independence.

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[29] For instance, in January 1, 2001, Alberta had 980 high school students enrolled in RAP. Of those, 228 attended high schools in Edmonton (Personal conversation with Alberta Learning representative, March 19, 2001). Unfortunately, these 228 RAP students are spread all across high schools in the city, sometimes as few as 2 or 3 per school, which makes access to them rather difficult. If the sampling frame was to extend beyond Edmonton, it would be even more difficult to contact apprentices.

My first few individual interviews revealed at least two important response patterns that required some modification to the interview guide and more flexibility in the data collection strategy. For instance, I recognized early on that youth apprentices were keen to talk about the new responsibilities they were granted in the workplace and how this led to a sense of maturity beyond that of their peers at school. I recognized these narratives as important elements in the way youth apprentices made sense, at least in hindsight, of their decisions to enter youth apprenticeships. They also contained important elements demarcating themselves from their friends and peers in mainstream school programs. Although I was aware of the literature on maturity, pseudo-maturity, and the influences of working on youth development (e.g., Greenberger and Steinberg 1986), I had not initially expected this theme to be of great importance to the study of agency and structural constraints in school-work transitions. Yet, realizing its role in these processes, I included this theme in my semi-structured interview guide for all subsequent interviews and focus groups.

An even more methodologically important need for reflexivity in the research process was my realization that focus groups might prove to be a better data collection strategy than individual interviews. This shift in preference was partly determined by schools' reluctance to commit too much time to this project and to allow an outside person in the school for too long. School timetables are a very intricate arrangement of the time-space continuum, and my continued presence in the school, as well as my ongoing request to remove individual students from classrooms created logistical problems for some school administrators. Asking to spend 90 minutes with groups of four or five students proved to be a much easier "sell" than trying to conduct 45 minute individual interviews with the same four or five students.

However important the move from individual interviews to focus groups may have been for the maintenance of positive relationships with school teachers and administrators, it also offered two crucial sampling and data collection benefits. First, in terms of sampling strategy, my four-cell sampling matrix required a relatively large number of participants in order to survive scrutiny in terms of reliability, validity, and generalizability. Focus groups offer the potential of increasing the quantity of responses, while at the same time retaining many of the strengths of individual interviews. Second, from a data quality perspective, I found that young people, particularly those who may be considered less articulate (or willing to talk), appeared far more engaged and talkative in groups. Few of the participants in the focus groups showed the kinds of inhibitions I had observed with some participants in early individual interviews. Being able to respond to the ideas of others in the group brought unexpected stories and insights into the discussion. I might not have heard these stories had I followed my interview guide in individual interviews. For instance, the dynamics of focus groups, particularly in the male-dominated focus groups with trades apprentices, revealed some rich insights into the banter and attitudes of working life masculinity that would not have been obvious in individual interviews.

Some social researchers look at focus groups with suspicion, possibly due to their association with market research in which they are used extensively (Morgan 1988). However, this should not detract from the advantages they offer social scientists. Madriz (2000, 836-837) confirms my observations in this study when she argues that focus groups offer the advantage of observing interaction between participants, generating spontaneous responses that ease involvement and participation, and limiting the interference of the interviewer on the interview process. Madriz proposes the use of focus groups in feminist research, particularly with women in severely disadvantaged situations. My study has shown that using focus groups might also be effective in youth research, as many young people may not yet have acquired the confidence to openly speak about experiences with a stranger (who appears to them, it should be noted, in a position of authority). Instead, both their school and private lives are probably more characterized by activities carried out in groups. Speaking to a researcher in a group thus may be more in tune with their social experiences, and offers the further advantage of making the researcher appear as a less authoritative figure.

Focus groups can thus not only increase the quantity of responses, they can also increase the quality, through observable interaction, emergence of unexpected themes and topics, and the potential of creating a more natural interaction between participants and researcher than a one-on-one interview (Stewart and Shamdasani 1990). Of course, these strengths are also tempered by some disadvantages. Just as focus groups have the potential to make interactions more natural and to generate spontaneous responses, they can also mean a loss of control of the researcher over the interview process and a blurring of lines between truly individual responses (i.e., responses an individual would have given in a one-on-one interview) and responses meant to conform to the attitudes and dynamics of the group (Morgan 1988, 21). The last criticism is particularly crucial, as it affects the validity and reliability of data generated through focus groups. Carey (1994, 234-236) writes that

> Members in a group are interactive, dynamic suppliers of information. Participation is interactive in the sense that a member's contribution exists in a social context affected by previous statements and other factors, such as conformity and censoring ...

These concerns are not to be taken lightly. However, as I carried out both individual interviews and focus groups in this study, I was able to assess individual responses in focus groups in comparison to responses received from other participants in individual interviews. While the focus groups provided invaluable insights into interactions, similar responses and the emergence of similar themes in both one-on-one interviews and focus groups suggested to me that problems of conformity and censorship in focus groups were minimal. Two examples may illustrate this point.

Since the best mix of focus groups and individual interviews was obtained in the sub-group of Edmonton RAP students, I took a closer look to see if individual responses and response patterns using the two different data collection strategies were similar. Without any prompts on my part, issues of how careers might be affected by motherhood and women's responsibility for raising a family were discussed by female RAP students in both focus groups and individual interviews (the same was also true for Edmonton female academic-track students). Similarly, all respondents in both individual interviews and focus groups discussed at great length the influence participation in RAP has had on their sense of maturity and responsibility. I already indicated how this emerged as a strong pattern early on and how I modified my interview guide accordingly. However, in almost all instances, this issue emerged on its own, without me resorting to the interview guide. As there are similar examples for the Edmonton academic sub-group, I was confident that I could combine and compare data collected with the two different strategies, and that the benefits of switching from individual interviews to focus groups outweighed any possible disadvantages.

Survey

A survey (see Appendix F) was administered after the interview or focus group and was completed by all but two of the participants. This survey provided a means of analyzing patterns of structural reproduction within the sample at an aggregate level. The review of the structural reproduction and status attainment literature in Chapter 3 revealed a remarkably persistent class-based inequality in educational attainment.

Recognizing this level of structural inequality is essential for the discussion of how individuals themselves might play an important role in its reproduction. It was therefore necessary to collect socio-economic data on which an initial structural analysis could be based. For ethical reasons, some of these data were difficult to obtain in focus groups. Answering questions regarding family income, or parents' occupational and educational attainment in a focus group is likely to cause discomfort with some participants. Instead, using a survey to obtain this socio-economic background data was less intrusive and seemed a more reliable way of collecting this type of sensitive information.

Slightly modified (and translated) questionnaires were used for participants in each of the four sub-groups (i.e., Edmonton RAP, Edmonton academic-track, Bremen apprentices, Bremen academic-track). All participants were asked the same questions regarding age, gender, ethnicity, and family socio-economic status. I also included a range of items intended to assess notions of cultural capital, both in their current lives (e.g., participation in high and low culture, like going to the theatre or the movies) and in their homes (the emphasis their parents placed on manual/physical versus intellectual skills). While these items provided background information that was not obtained during the interviews or focus groups, the questionnaires also included some Likert-scale items intended for triangulation purposes. For instance, participants were asked to rate structural factors (e.g., class, gender, ethnicity, locality) that might constrain individual agency in school-work transitions. As these issues were also addressed in the interviews, the questionnaire items can be used to assess validity and also for theory construction. As a potential measure of validity, they confirm (or contradict) participants' narratives.[30] While all participants in a focus group did not respond to each question I asked, the inclusion of similar questions in a questionnaire answered by all participants increased the number of observed cases and thus enhanced generalizability.

Research Ethics

My study was reviewed and approved by two review boards at the University of Alberta (the Faculty of Arts Research Ethics Board, and the Cooperative Activities Program (CAP) at the Faculty of Education), as well as by three school boards in Edmonton (Edmonton Public School Board, Edmonton Catholic School Board, and Black Gold School Division). Research procedures in Germany were facilitated through contacts with the University of Bremen, and individual permission to carry out interviews and focus groups was granted by individual school principals and teachers.

Research procedures in Edmonton and Bremen followed the same ethics guidelines, which guaranteed voluntary participation, anonymity, and confidentiality. Once the university and the school boards had approved the study, school principals were approached with a letter outlining the study and the research protocol to be followed. All students who agreed to participate in the study were given a similar letter outlining the conditions of their participation (Appendix D). Students under the age of 18 were given a letter and consent form to be read and signed by their parents (if they agreed to their child's participation) prior to the interview and to be returned to me at the time of the interview or focus group (see Appendices B and C). Both the letters to the students and the parents outlined the nature of the research and included my own and my supervisor's contact information, should there be any concerns or questions related to the research and the student's participation.

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[30] Silverman (2001) suggests that even the inclusion of a few simple counts in qualitative studies can support qualitative findings as they may convince more skeptical readers who otherwise only have the researchers' word vouching for validity and reliability.

Before the start of the interview or focus group, participants were asked to sign a consent form that once again outlined the conditions of their participation (see Appendix E): participation was entirely voluntary and participants could refuse to answer individual questions or withdraw from the interview/focus group at any time; participants' identity would be kept confidential, and names of schools, employers, and participants would be changed in any resulting publication of research data to protect the anonymity of participants. The consent form also contained a schedule for the destruction of audio tapes and interview transcripts generated from the research.

I have made every effort possible to follow these guidelines by keeping transcripts, surveys, and audio tapes in a safe place only accessible to myself. I have been the only person who has worked with the raw data (i.e., I carried out all the interviews and focus groups myself and personally transcribed all the data).

Data Analysis

Given the tremendous amount of data accumulated through interviews and focus groups with 105 participants, as well as extensive field notes on focus group interactions, non-verbal communications and emerging themes and concepts, I turned to NUDIST (Version 6) for my data analysis. NUDIST was a particularly useful tool as it allows for complexity in the coding process, but with easy data access and recall.

I transcribed all interviews and focus groups myself, including comments on non-verbal communication and interactions. The German focus groups were transcribed in

German, and only the quotes and excerpts used in this dissertation were translated into English. In the translation, I made every effort possible to take account of and preserve slang and colloquialisms. On occasions, this required some poetic license, particularly as participants' language and expression turned to the more flowery and ornate. All participants were given unique pseudonyms to protect their identity, but to make it possible to identify them as individual speakers throughout the data analysis. Thus I was able to follow some individuals whose stories emerged as particularly salient for the different empirical and theoretical themes and concepts.

I noted emerging themes throughout the data collection and transcription process. This proved to be immensely useful when I began to set up coding categories during data analysis. Using these extensive field notes, I was able, from the outset, to set up a tentative coding scheme, or coding hierarchy, representing the key theoretical and empirical categories. The initial round of coding, using the some coding categories and hierarchies, was done separately for each of the four cells in the sampling matrix (i.e., Edmonton youth apprentices, Edmonton academic-track students, Bremen youth apprentices, Bremen academic-track students). Keeping data in the four groups separate in the initial stages of data analysis was an important strategy, as I needed to highlight the validity of this theoretically determined sampling strategy, without over-complicating my analysis. This procedure was guided by Coffey and Atkinson (1996, 30) who refer to coding as a "mixture of data reduction and data complication." Data reduction, of course, is characterized by "teasing out" key elements of the broader narratives. Data complication is the result of more theoretical engagement with the data and coding categories which opens up the inquiry and moves toward interpretation.

As data analysis continued, I largely followed the coding process prescribed by Strauss and Corbin (1990). The first stage of coding involved *open coding*, in which interview data were broken down into discrete parts, or categories, and the different categories were compared for similarities and differences (ibid., 62). For instance, open coding categories included "Accounts of Own Decision Making"; "Influences Attributed to Others"; and "Attitude towards School." These categories were organized hierarchically, in a coding tree format, so that, for instance, "Influences Attributed to Others" contained a number of sub-categories (e.g., "Parents," "Friends," "Teachers").

The second stage of coding, which Strauss and Corbin (ibid., 96) call *axial coding*, involves closer analysis of single categories for the strategies, contexts, forms of agency, and consequences this category entails. Important in this stage was a comparison of the detailed findings of different categories, which helped in identifying contradictions and breaks in individual narratives, and thus created a more complex, theoretical picture of the transitions processes that participants described. For instance, I had to weigh stories of independent decision making in the transitions to youth apprenticeship against parallel stories that challenged these narratives of independence (e.g., the types of interests and skills stressed in the home environment, parents' wishes, and guidance counselors' influences).

The third and final coding stage was *selective coding*, during which a single core category is developed (in this study, the core theoretical category of *habitual agency*). This core category represents the theoretical anchor for the study, to which all other categories become, in a sense, subsidiaries.

Validity, Reliability, and Generalizability

Although some qualitative researchers, particularly those working within the postmodern and poststructuralist paradigms, resist submitting their research to the empiricist, and positivist scrutiny of reliability, validity, and generalizability, I explained earlier my commitment to a postpositivist realism that aims to build empirical and theoretical knowledge on the basis of the discovery of causal mechanisms. If causality remains important, however, so must issues of reliability, validity, and generalizability. Some issues regarding validity and generalizability were already raised in my discussion of data collection strategies. However, some further comments regarding these issues would be useful.

Reliability

Despite keeping interviews and focus groups relatively open, and while allowing participants' to determine the flow of the conversation as much as possible, the use of a semi-structured interview guide assured that ultimately all interviews and focus groups covered the same topics and issues. Furthermore, reliability of the data was enhanced because all interviews and focus groups were tape recorded, and because I personally transcribed them myself, thus ensuring that non-verbal communication and particularly interaction dynamics in the focus group were not lost. Finally, as the following chapters outlining the research findings will demonstrate, I have followed Silverman's (2001, 230) advice of presenting long extracts of data, including the questions that provoked answers and narratives. This assures that utterances and answers are not presented out of context and "misused" for theoretical purposes.

Validity

I outlined earlier how the use of a systematic survey administered to all but two respondents helped assess the validity of the interview and focus group findings. Obvious discrepancies between an individual's narrative in an interview/focus group and his or her responses in the questionnaire can aid theory construction, as such contrary instances may provide rich insights into individuals' construction of experiences.

Another form of validity frequently prescribed for qualitative researchers is that of respondent validation, in which a researcher takes his or her findings back to the participants and asks them for verification (Silverman 2001). The logistical difficulties (and time constraints) of doing this in a comparative study like mine obviously makes such a form of verification impossible. However, validity in this study was also assured through the rigorous analysis of data, including constant comparison between cases, categories, and concepts, tabulations of confirming and deviant cases, and, as discussed above, the inclusion of quantitative measures to support findings generated from the interview and focus group data. Furthermore, despite its unique comparative methodological approach, my confidence in the validity of my findings is supported by the fact that findings concerning individual motivations and dispositions, as well as the relationships between structure and agency for the four sub-groups (Edmonton youth apprentices, Edmonton academic-track high school students, German youth apprentices, and German *Gymnasium* students) reflect earlier findings of similar studies in Canada and Germany (e.g., Andres Bellamy 1993; Evans 2002; Heinz et al. 1987). However, the greater scope of comparisons (within and between countries), the relatively large number of participants, the inclusion of a wider range of structural variables, and the theoretical reasoning move this study beyond the existing research literature.

Generalizability

Given the relatively large number of cases for a qualitative study, judging generalizability may not be so different from the criteria used for quantitative studies. Of initial importance here is the selection of research sites (i.e., schools). As already mentioned, the Edmonton schools were selected for their above average enrolment in RAP, but also because they encompassed four different areas of Edmonton, drawing students from a variety of socio-economic backgrounds. Furthermore, my use of a theoretically-driven, purposive sampling strategy, which also included "deviant cases" (e.g., working-class youth planning on attending university) enhances what Seale (1999, 109-113) calls theoretical generalizability. Seale argues that it is not so much that the selected cases (i.e., the empirical data) have to be statistically representative, but that the theoretically derived conclusions are generalizable. Quoting Mitchell, Seale suggests that the basis of theoretical generalization lies in logic rather than statistical probability, which is to say that one can generalize, for instance, from a case study not because it is representative, but because the theoretical analysis is unassailable (Mitchell 1983, 200).

Participant Profiles

Location, Gender, Age, and Ethnicity

Of the 105 participants, 52 were interviewed in the four Edmonton schools and 53 in Bremen. Sixty-five of the participants were youth apprentices (29 of them in Edmonton, and 36 in Bremen) and 40 were academic-track high school students (23 in Edmonton, and 17 in Bremen) (see Table 10 below). The vast majority of youth apprentices participating in the study were male, both in the Edmonton and in the German samples. The Edmonton apprentice sub-sample included only five women, all of whom apprenticed as hairdressers. Although I tried to include young women apprenticing in traditionally male trades, there were none in the schools I selected for my study. One young woman had started RAP as an automotive technician in the previous year, but by the time the school made contact with her, she had quit the apprenticeship.

Table 10. Participation by Location, Type of Program and Gender

	Edmonton			Bremen			Total
	Total	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	
Youth Apprentices	29	23	6	36	25	11	65
Academic Track	23	12	11	17	2	15	40
Total	52	35	17	53	27	26	105

Essentially the same picture emerged for the German youth apprentices. Out of 36 participants, 11 were female. Again, none of the female youth apprentices were in traditionally male trades, although at least two were not in hairdressing but apprenticed as chefs. When I asked a female teacher at the school for metal-based trades in Bremen about efforts to increase female participation in male-dominated trades, she said that such efforts, although they do exist, have been very unsuccessful and even abandoned in recent years (Personal conversation, May 30, 2002). Similarly, there are few efforts in Alberta to increase female participation in traditional male trades. There are no equity programs or initiatives (at least at the high school level) that try to increase participation of women in male-dominated apprenticeships. Generally, it is seen as sufficient to ensure that young women are aware of the opportunities in the trades (Taylor and Lehmann 2002).

As is to be expected, given enrolment statistics in higher education in both Canada and Germany and my attempt to construct a representative sample, female participation was much higher in the academic student samples. Eleven of the 23 academic-track Edmonton high school students and 15 of the 17 grammar school participants in Bremen were female. Most participants fell into the 16 to 19 age range, both in the apprenticeship and the academic groups (see Table 11).

Table 11: Participation by Average Age (rounded)

	Edmonton	Bremen
Youth Apprentices	17	19
Academics	17	18
Total	17	19

German youth apprentices were slightly older (average age 19) than Canadian youth apprentices (average age 17) and both academic-track comparison groups. The higher average age for German youth apprentices is largely explained by shifts in educational attainment which have seen more students opting for the middle or higher school qualifications and thus staying in school for longer (see Chapter 2). Furthermore, the German apprentice sub-group contained two older participants (aged 26 and 31) who were in retraining and this pushed up the average age for this sub-group. Nevertheless, I chose to include them in the final analysis, as they added further insights into the study of life course events.

As for participation of visible minorities, 15 percent (or four) of the Edmonton youth apprentices were members of visible minority groups, compared to a slightly higher 26 percent (or six) in the Edmonton academic-track sample. The four visible minority youth apprentices were comprised of one African-Canadian, one Hispanic and two East-Asian students. None of the youth apprentices identified themselves as First Nation Canadians. In contrast, two of the six academic-track high school students in the Edmonton sample identified themselves as Aboriginals, and four were East-Asian.

The Bremen youth apprentice sample and the academic track students both included only two members of ethnic minority groups. The ethnic minority youth apprentices in Bremen were Turkish, while the two academic-track ethnic minority students were also of Middle Eastern descent, but not from Turkey. This low number of participants in both apprenticeship programs and academic programs is a reasonably accurate representation of ethnic minorities in German post-secondary programs. For instance, in 1999, only 6 percent of all apprentices were not of German descent (Bundesministerium für Bildung und Forschung 2001, 135). This under-representation of women and visible minorities is seen to stem from the fact that apprenticeship positions are distributed via the labour market (Alba, Handl and Müller 1994, Damm-Rüger 1994). In other words, hiring biases in apprenticeship programs reflect racist and sexist practices in the labour market overall.

Living Arrangements

While all Edmonton youth apprentices were still living with either both, or one of their parents, a third of the Bremen apprentices (33 percent) had left their parental home and lived either on their own (17 percent) or with others (17 percent), including partners and room mates. This difference reflects the higher average age of German youth apprentices, but can also be attributed to the fact that the German youth apprenticeship program is a post-secondary program (rather than secondary, as is the case with RAP). Thus, some of the Bremen youth apprentices had to move from rural areas into the city in order to find employment in their chosen career and to attend technical training at vocational schools. This was the case for two of the participants apprenticing as chefs. Although they grew up and went to secondary school in rural areas, their career ambitions encouraged them to seek employment with higher-end restaurants in the city. Similarly, one of the apprentices in the metal trades (shipbuilding) originally hailed from landlocked central Germany. In the academic-track samples, only one student in both Edmonton and Bremen lived with somebody other than their parents.

Apprenticeship Occupations

Compared to Germany's dual system, with over 300 occupations in which apprenticeship training is possible, apprenticing in Alberta is restricted to approximately 50 occupations that can be largely classified as trades occupations. As can be seen in Table 12 below, the occupational distribution of RAP participants is largely representative of overall apprenticeship enrolment in the different trades. I tried to include apprentices from a reasonably representative range of trades. For instance, there is above average enrolment for welders, heavy equipment technicians, automotive mechanics, carpenters, chefs, and hairdressing, both for RAP students, and for all apprentices across Alberta. My sample reflects these enrolment patterns by including a higher number of participants in these occupations (see Table 12). Exceptions are the inclusion of a recreational vehicle technician and a landscape gardener, two occupations with low levels of RAP student enrolment.

Table 12: All Alberta Apprentices* and RAP Participants by Trade as of Dec. 31, 2001; and Study Participants by Trade as of October 31, 2002

TRADE DESCRIPTION	All Apprentices*	RAP	Sample
Agricultural Equipment Technician	87	5	
Appliance Service Technician	74	1	
Auto Body Technician	567	33	
Automotive Service Technician	2,392	126	3
Baker	204	8	
Boilermaker	180	0	
Bricklayer	152	1	
Cabinetmaker	452	24	
Carpenter	2,720	80	2
Communication Electrician	423	4	
Concrete Finisher	74	1	
Cook	1,028	64	4
Crane and Hoisting Equipment Operator	1,215	5	
Electrical Motor Systems Technician	51	2	
Electrician	5,947	8	3
Electronic Technician	58	1	
Elevator Constructor	127	0	
Floorcovering Installer	53	0	
Gasfitter	166	3	
Glazier	136	6	
Hairstylist	1,776	100	5
Heavy Equipment Technician	2,597	88	3
Instrument Technician	1,401	29	
Insulator	531	1	
Ironworker	373	1	
Ironworker - Metal Building Systems Erector	89	0	
Landscape Gardener	198	3	1
Lather-Interior Systems Mechanic	106	5	
Locksmith	61	4	
Machinist	896	21	
Millwright	1,365	26	2
Motorcycle Mechanic	125	14	1
Outdoor Power Technician	22	0	
Painter and Decorator	155	2	
Parts Technician	662	22	
Plumber	2,168	26	
Power Lineman	199	2	
Power System Electrician	78	0	
Printing & Graphic Arts	1	0	
Recreational Vehicle Service Technician	94	1	1
Refrigeration & Air Conditioning Mechanic	436	5	
Roofer	118	0	
Sawfiler	23	0	
Sheet Metal Worker	829	6	
Sprinkler Systems Installer	233	2	
Steamfitter-Pipefitter	1,711	10	1
Structural Steel and Plate Fitter	172	2	
Tilesetter	62	1	
Transport Refrigeration Mechanic	47	3	
Water Well Driller	35	1	
Welder	5,421	153	3
Total	38,090	980	29

* *This category includes Adult and RAP Apprentices*

Source: Alberta Apprenticeship and Industry Training Board (2002, 41, 51)

Although many trades occupations are classified differently in Germany, I matched the occupations of Bremen youth apprentices as closely as possible to those in the Edmonton sample (see Table 13). This was easy for most of the construction (e.g., carpenters and electricians) and vehicle-type (e.g., automotive mechanics) occupations. However, welding is one of the most important trades in Alberta, but does not exist as such in Germany. Instead, I chose a group of apprentices working in a range of "metal" trades (e.g., shipbuilding) for whom welding is an integral component of their training and work.

Table 13. Trades/Occupations of Youth Apprentices, by Location

Edmonton	N	Bremen	N
Automotive, Motorcycle & RV Technicians Heavy Equipment Technicians	8	Automotive Technician Heavy Equipment Technician	5
Electrician	3	Electrician	5
Carpenter	2	Carpenters/Roofers	5
Welder Millwright Pipefitter	6	Metal (welding does not exist in Germany as a discrete trade)	5
Hairdressers	5	Hairdressers	10
Chefs	4	Chefs	6
Landscaping	1		
Total	29		36

Educational Attainment of Apprentices

I was also interested in the educational background with which German youth apprentices entered their apprenticeships. As discussed in Chapter 2, apprenticeships in the trades were traditionally entered by students graduating from the *Hauptschule* stream. However, increased enrolment in the two higher-level secondary streams (*Realschule* and *Gymnasium*) has led to displacement competition, in which graduates from higher school streams are now entering apprenticeships that were previously the domain of *Hauptschule* graduates. It is therefore not surprising to find that more than half of the apprentices in my Bremen sample had graduated from the two higher-level secondary schools. Seventeen of the 36 Bremen apprentices (47 percent) were graduates from the *Hauptschule*, 18 (or 50 percent) had finished the middle school stream (*Realschule*), and one had graduated from the *Gymnasium*. Although there was a mix of *Hauptschule* and *Realschule* graduates in all six occupational groups represented in the sample, there is also some evidence that there is a hierarchy of occupations within the trades, with the higher-status occupations being dominated by *Realschule* graduates. For instance, most of the car mechanics, electricians, and chefs had entered their apprentices with a *Realschule* diploma, whereas most of the metal workers, roofers/carpenters, and hairdressers had attended *Hauptschule*.

Edmonton apprentices were asked to comment on their average marks in Grade 10 (i.e., prior to entering RAP). None of the Edmonton apprentices had average marks in the above 80 percent range, and only two fell under the 50 percent range. Twelve participants (44 percent) said that their average marks in Grade 10 fell into the 65 to 79 percent range, and 13 (48 percent) fell into the 50 to 64 percent range. While this shows that few high-achieving students are attracted into the program, it also suggests that RAP may actually be out of reach for students with educational attainment problems, despite the fact that "at risk" students are one of the target groups for this program.

Academic-Track Post-secondary Plans

Research on career aspirations of high school students in Canada has shown an increasing preference for careers in the professions (e.g., Lowe and Krahn 2000). The post-secondary education and career plans of both Edmonton and Bremen academic-track participants indeed included occupations in law, medicine, teaching, business, and engineering. Six of the 23 Edmonton participants hoped to enter engineering programs, while four considered a career in teaching. However, some students in both Edmonton and Bremen reported somewhat more unusual career plans. One Edmonton high school student hoped to embark on a career as a recording artist, although he was also considering a degree in education. Other career plans in Edmonton included police officer, paramedic, military pilot, conservation biologist, nursing, and social worker. Two respondents admitted to an interest in sociology, while only one Edmonton respondent considered an apprenticeship (as automotive technician) as his first choice upon completion of high school. Two of the Edmonton participants were still undecided about a career or post-secondary program, but were committed to enter university.

Given the very low number of male participants in the Bremen academic sample, engineering was not mentioned as a career option. Instead, career plans in the Bremen sample gravitated more toward law (three participants), teaching (two participants), business administration (two participants) and medicine (two participants). Still located within the field of medicine, one Bremen participant hoped to begin training as a dietician a few months later, and another young women planned to become a midwife. Two participants were hoping to enter the field of design, two others were interested in studying psychology, one young man hoped to become a journalist, and another young woman was planning to study biology. As these career plans indicate, the majority of participants in both the Edmonton and Bremen samples (70 percent) were hoping to enter university upon completion of secondary education (see Table 14).

Table 14. Post-secondary Education Plans of Academic Track Students, by Location

Type of Post-secondary Education	Edmonton	Bremen	Total
University	16 (70%)	12 (70%)	28 (70%)
College	6 (26%)	3 (18%)	9 (23%)
Apprenticeship	1 (4%)	2 (12%)	3 (7%)
Total	23 (100%)	17 (100%)	40 (100%)

With this understanding of who the study participants are, the following five chapters present and discuss the findings from the survey, the interviews, and the focus groups. The discussion of findings begins with an analysis of structural reproduction using the data gathered through the quantitative survey. This is followed by a largely descriptive account of young people's own narratives of motivations and dispositions toward the high school transition paths they have chosen and how they perceived the influence of others on this decision.

From there, the analysis moves into a more interpretive phase, as participants' stories are analyzed as strategies of construction and re-construction that provide insight into ways in which structure and agency are interwoven.

Chapter 5

Contradictory Evidence from the Quantitative and Qualitative Data: When Structure Met Agency

I begin the analysis with a look at how socio-economic background influences participation in either youth apprenticeships or academic-track programs at high school. Strong evidence of reproductive effects of socio-economic background is found in the data gathered through the quantitative survey. Using the qualitative interview and focus group data, I then look at how the young people in my study themselves view their participation in a different fashion. Thus, this chapter addresses both my second and third research questions, which ask: a) who participates in academic high school programs and youth apprenticeships and how the participants in the two streams are different (e.g., in terms of class, gender, and cultural capital); and, b) to what extent do young people themselves perceive their participation in either academic high school programs or youth apprenticeships as shaped by structural elements or as the result of active choice?

Structural Reproduction: Survey Findings

Parents' Education

Study participants in both Edmonton and Bremen were asked to provide information regarding their parents' educational attainment. Although the small sample makes it difficult to reach statistical significance,[31] Table 15 below does suggest a causal relationship between parents' level of education and participation in either youth apprenticeships or academic-track programs in the Canadian sample. Edmonton participants whose parents had a university education were much more likely to be in the academic group than were participants whose parents had a high school diploma as their highest level of education. For example, only 36 percent of those whose fathers had only a high school education were in the academic group, in contrast to more than half of those with a more educated father.

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[31] The survey data analyzed were not collected from a random sample but, instead, from a carefully constructed judgement sample meant to be as representative as possible. Hence, tests of statistical significance to allow generalizations to a larger population are not technically appropriate. I use them, nevertheless, as measures of the size of differences in findings between sub-groups within my sample.

Table 15. Type of Program by Parents' Highest Level of Education, Edmonton

	Mother's Education				Father's Education			
	High school or less	Non-university post-sec	University	Total	High school or less	Non-university post-sec	University	Total
RAP	12 (57%)	6 (55%)	3 (27%)	21 (49%)	7 (64%)	8 (44%)	6 (46%)	21 (50%)
Academic Track	9 (43%)	5 (45%)	8 (73%)	22 (51%)	4 (36%)	10 (56%)	7 (54%)	21 (50%)
Total	21 (100%)	11 (100%)	11 (100%)	43 (100%)	11 (100%)	18 (100%)	13 (100%)	42 (100%)

Similarly, as shown in Table 16, students in the Bremen sample whose parents had higher levels of education were more likely to be in an academic-track program. In contrast, among the students whose father had a *Hauptschule* diploma, only 20 percent were in the academic-track sample, with 80 percent in the apprenticeship sample.

Table 16. Type of Program by Parents' Highest Level of Secondary Education, Bremen

	Mother's Education				Father's Education			
	Hauptschule or less	Realschule	Gymnasium	Total	Hauptschule or less	Realschule	Gymnasium	Total
Apprentices	12 (71%)	16 (80%)	6 (43%)	34 (67%)	12 (80%)	12 (71%)	5 (39%)	29 (64%)
Academic Track	5 (29%)	4 (20%)	8 (57%)	17 (33%)	3 (20%)	5 (29%)	8 (61%)	16 (36%)
Total	17 (100%)	20 (100%)	14 (100%)	51 (100%)	15 (100%)	17 (100%)	13 (100%)	45 (100%)

Table 17. Type of Program by Parents' Level of Post-secondary Education, Bremen

	Mother's Post-secondary Education			Father's Post-secondary Education		
	Vocational	Academic	Total	Vocational	Academic	Total*
Apprentices	27 (77%)	8 (53%)	35 (70%)	25 (81%)	6 (35%)	31 (65%)
Academic Track	8 (23%)	7 (47%)	15 (30%)	6 (19%)	11 (65%)	17 (35%)
Total	35 (100%)	15 (100%)	50 (100%)	31 (100%)	17 (100%)	48 (100%)

* Differences significant at the $p<0.01$ level

As Germany's streamed secondary education system reaches far into both post-secondary education and occupational attainment, the same relationship can be observed when looking at parents' post-secondary attainment. Table 17 shows the distribution of academic-track students and youth apprentices according to whether their parents had completed vocational (i.e., apprenticeship training in the dual system, but also less common forms of school-based vocational education) or academic post-secondary (i.e., university or polytechnic, *Fachhochschule*) education. Of all study participants whose fathers' had completed vocational education, 81 percent were apprentices themselves, while only 19 percent attended *Gymnasium*.[32]

Parents' Occupation

The background questionnaire completed by all interview and focus group participants included an open-ended item about mothers' and fathers' occupation. Unfortunately, many answers were somewhat vague (e.g., "works in a warehouse"), but I was able to code most according to Canada's National Occupational Classification (NOC). Within the NOC, occupations can be ordered into four skill levels: 1) Level A, which includes professional occupations (e.g., lawyers, doctors, professors); 2) Level B, which includes skilled occupations (e.g., assistant-type occupations and the skilled trades); 3) Level C, which includes semi-skilled occupations (e.g., retail sales, clerical occupations, drivers); and 4) Level D, which includes unskilled occupations (e.g., cashiers, cleaners, labourers).

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[32] Even though Tables 15, 16, and 17 all showed the same type of relationship, only the relationship between father's education and child's education was statistically significant, because the percentage differences were slightly larger.

The majority of respondents' parents, 54 percent of all mothers and 55 percent of all fathers, were in Level B occupations. This was particularly the case for the German sample, given the country's credential-intensive labour market and the role of the dual system in providing skilled workers. When analyzing apprenticeship and academic-track participants according to their parents' occupation, a picture emerges that supports arguments of social reproduction.

Table 18. Type of Program by Parents' Occupation, Edmonton and Bremen Combined

	Mother's Occupation				Father's Occupation			
	NOC A	NOC B	NOC C&D	Total	NOC A	NOC B	NOC C&D	Total*
Apprentices	7 54%	28 60%	18 67%	53 61%	4 21%	32 63%	18 82%	54 59%
Academic Track	6 46%	19 40%	9 33%	39 39%	15 79%	19 37%	4 18%	38 41%
Total	13 100%	47 100%	27 100%	87 100%	19 100%	51 100%	22 100%	92 100%

*Differences significant at the p<.001 level

As Table 18 shows, participants' whose fathers' occupations are characterized by a high skill level are significantly more likely to be in the academic track. Specifically, of all the participants whose fathers' occupation was classified as falling into NOC level A (i.e., highly skilled work), 79 percent were in the academic track, versus 21 percent in youth apprenticeship programs. Mother's occupation did not have a statistically significant impact on type of program, although the pattern was similar.

When controlling on location (i.e., Edmonton or Bremen), we see the same pattern in both countries, but the relationship was slightly stronger (and more significant) in the Bremen sample (Table 19). Here, 75 percent of participants whose fathers' occupations were in skill level A were in the academic group. In contrast, virtually all of the Bremen participants whose fathers had level B, C, or D occupations were in the apprentice track.

Table 19. Type of Program by Father's Occupation and Location

	Edmonton				Bremen			
	NOC A	NOC B	NOC C&D	Total*	NOC A	NOC B	NOC C&D	Total**
Apprentices	1 14%	13 54%	11 73%	25 54%	3 25%	19 70%	7 100%	29 63%
Academic Track	6 86%	11 46%	4 27%	21 46%	9 75%	8 30%	0 0%	17 37%
Total	7 100%	24 100%	15 100%	46 100%	12 100%	27 100%	7 100%	46 100%

* Differences significant at the $p<.05$ level
**Differences significant at the $p<.01$ level

Family Income

As with parents' occupations, asking high school students about family income often leads to unreliable information. To address this problem, I told my study participants how much an average family earned and then asked them to indicate whether they felt their family income was average, above average, or below average (see Appendix F, Question 12). We do see a statistically significant relationship between family income (as estimated by the participants) and their participation in either youth apprenticeships or academic-track programs (Table 20). Participants who estimated their family income as above average were more likely to be in the academic stream. These findings further suggest the reproduction of class-based inequalities via participation in youth apprenticeships.

Table 20. Type of Program by Family Income Compared to National Average, Edmonton and Bremen Combined

	Family Income Compared to National Average		
	Below Average & Average	Above Average	Total*
Apprentices	44 70%	14 42%	58 60%
Academic Track	19 30%	19 58%	38 40%
Total	63 100%	33 100%	96 100%

*Differences significant at the p<.01 level

When controlling for location, we see a very similar relationship between (estimated) family income and participation in either youth apprenticeships or the academic track (see Table 21). Although the smaller sample sizes in the two sub-samples (i.e., Edmonton and Bremen) make it difficult to reach statistical significance, the percentage differences suggest that almost identical patterns can be observed in the Edmonton and Bremen sub-samples.

Table 21. Type of Program by Family Income Compared to National Average and Location

	Edmonton			Bremen		
	Below Average & Average	Above Average	Total	Below Average & Average	Above Average	Total
Apprentices	15 65%	9 41%	24 53%	29 73%	5 45%	34 67%
Academic	8 35%	13 59%	21 47%	11 27%	6 55%	17 33%
Total	23 100%	22 100%	45 100%	40 100%	11 100%	51 100%

Cultural Capital

My analysis of the survey data so far supports the findings of other studies in the structural reproduction tradition (see Chapter 3). Bourdieu and Passeron (1977) and Bourdieu (1984, 1990) have argued that these socially reproductive processes are linked to individuals' levels of cultural capital. In my background survey, I therefore included two sets of questions that were intended to measure cultural capital. The first asked participants if they engaged in various cultural activities (Appendix F, Question 13). These included both "high" and "low" culture, such as listening to classical versus pop music, going to the theatre versus going to the movies, reading books versus reading magazines, and playing an instrument versus playing sports. I created a cultural capital index by adding the number of high culture activities in which respondents participated.

Overall, 78 percent of all respondents participated in few high culture activities and 22 percent participate frequently in such activities.[33]

When cross-tabulating this measure of cultural capital by type of education (Table 22), we see statistically significant evidence of the type of relationships we would expect. As hypothesized, young people with low cultural capital were over-represented in the apprentice group (68 percent), compared to 32 percent in the academic track. Controlling for location (Table 23) yielded similar results for both the Bremen and Edmonton sub-samples, although the smaller sample size made it difficult to reach statistical significance.

Table 22. Type of Program by Levels of Cultural Capital, Edmonton and Bremen Combined

	Low Cultural Capital	High Cultural Capital	Total*
Apprentices	54 68%	9 39%	63 61%
Academic Track	26 32%	14 61%	40 39%
Total	80 100%	23 100%	103 100%

*Differences significant at the p<.05 level

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[33] The index was comprised of seven "high culture" activities: reading literature, writing, learning a musical instrument, going to classical music concerts, going to the theatre, listening to classical music, and going to the museum. Scores from 0 to 3 were considered "low cultural capital", and from 4 to 7 "high cultural capital."

Table 23. Type of Program by Levels of Cultural Capital and Location

	Edmonton			Bremen		
	Low Cultural Capital	High Cultural Capital	Total	Low Cultural Capital	High Cultural Capital	Total
Apprentices	21 62%	6 37%	27 54%	33 72%	3 43%	36 68%
Academic	13 38%	10 63%	23 46%	13 28%	14 57%	17 32%
Total	34 100%	16 100%	50 100%	46 100%	17 100%	53 100%

Gender emerged as an even more (statistically) significant variable (at the $p<0.01$ level, using a chi square test), with women being much more likely to engage in "high" culture activities (see Table 24). Some of this relationship is a function of the higher proportion of females in the academic group. However, gender appears to have an independent effect (which was apparent in the interviews and focus groups).

Table 24. Levels of Cultural Capital by Gender, Edmonton and Bremen Combined

	Low Cultural Capital	High Cultural Capital	Total*
Male	54 88%	7 12%	61 100%
Female	26 62%	16 38%	42 100%
Total	80 78%	23 22%	103 100%

*Differences significant at the $p<.001$ level

In my questionnaire, I also included a second set of items intended to measure cultural capital in a way that is more tied to habitus and the home. Respondents were asked to rate on a five-point scale how important certain skills were in their homes. The skill sets included manual and physical skills, artistic skills, intellectual skills, and being able to express oneself well and convincingly (Appendix F, Question 14).

As Table 25 shows, responses to these alternative measures of cultural capital as used in the home (and thus more explicitly tied to the notion of habitus) were significantly related to whether respondents were in academic-track or apprentice samples. With the exception of "being able to express oneself well and convincingly," these cross-tabulations indicate that young people who have grown up in a social environment in which being good at working with your hands (i.e., performing manual or physical labour) was considered an important skill are more likely to be in the apprenticeship program. In contrast, those who grew up in a home where being good at intellectual work (e.g., reading books) or artistic activities (e.g., playing a musical instrument) is important are more likely to be in the academic stream. Given the findings in Table 25, it appears that cultural capital expressed through habitus as formed in the immediate social environment may play an important role in the development of dispositions toward certain transition paths from high school into post-secondary education and employment.

Table 25. Program Type by Skills Used in the Home, Edmonton and Bremen Combined (Percent)

	% Not Important	% Important	Total
Manual Skills			
Apprentices	45	71	61
Academic	55	29	39
Total	100	100	100**
Artistic Skills			
Apprentices	70	46	61
Academic	30	53	39
Total	100	100	100*
Intellectual Skills			
Apprentices	74	40	61
Academic	26	60	39
Total	100	100	100**
"Being able to speak & express yourself"			
Apprentices	74	58	61
Academic	26	42	39
Total	100	100	100

Respondents were asked: "On a scale from one to five, with five indicating very important, how important do you think are the following skills in your family?" Values of one to three were recoded as "not important," while responses of four and five were recoded as "important."

* Difference significant at the $p<0.05$ level

**Difference significant at the $p<0.01$ level.

A preference for manual skills in the home emerged as a stronger (and significant) predictor for participation in youth apprenticeships in Bremen. Similarly, a preference for artistic skills in the homes of young people in Bremen was more likely to influence participation in the academic track. These findings highlight how cultural capital not only plays an important role during the rigorous, early streaming in Germany's school system (see Chapter 2), but also for the formation of vocational and educational preferences throughout secondary education.

The fact that a preference in the home for intellectual skills was more significant for participation in academic programs in Edmonton may at first appear contradictory to these findings of cross-national differences. However, this, too, might be explained by the differences in the two school systems. Like their academic peers, Edmonton youth apprentices are still part of the high school system. As I will show in more detail later (see Chapter 7), participation in youth apprenticeships is seen as a way to oppose the "theoretical" or "intellectual" elements of high school by pursuing more "practical" and "applied" forms of learning. In contrast, the German youth apprentices have already left the secondary school system and are more likely to re-define intellectual skills in terms of work-related problem solving.

Table 26. Program Type by Skills Used in the Home and Location

	Edmonton			Bremen		
	Not Important	Important	Total	Not Important	Important	Total
Manual Skills						
Apprentices	7 44%	20 59%	27 54%	10 45%	26 84%	36 68%
Academic	9 56%	14 41%	26 46%	12 55%	5 16%	17 32%
Total	16 100%	34 100%	50 100%	22 100%	31 100%	53 100%*
Artistic Skills						
Apprentices	18 56%	9 50%	27 54%	26 84%	9 43%	35 67%
Academic	14 44%	9 50%	23 46%	5 16%	12 57%	17 33%
Total	32 100%	18 100%	50 100%	31 100%	21 100%	52 100%*
Intellectual Skills						
Apprentices	22 71%	5 26%	27 54%	24 77%	11 52%	35 67%
Academic	9 29%	14 78%	23 46%	7 22%	10 48%	17 33%
Total	31 100%	19 100%	50 100%*	31 100%	21 100%	52 100%
"Being able to speak & express yourself"						
Apprentices	8 80%	19 48%	27 54%	6 67%	29 67%	35 67%
Academic	2 20%	21 52%	23 46%	3 33%	14 33%	17 33%
Total	10 100%	40 100%	50 100%	9 100%	43 100%	52 100%

Respondents were asked: "On a scale from one to five, with five indicating very important, how important do you think are the following skills in your family?" Values of one to three were recoded as "not important," while responses of four and five were recoded as "important."

* Difference significant at the $p<0.01$ level

In summary, then, a purely quantitative portrait of the participants in this study provides ample evidence for the existence of processes of social stratification, status attainment, and cultural reproduction. However, as the following analysis of the qualitative interview and focus group data will show, participants' narratives of rationality, choice, ambitions, and hopes cast a much more nuanced light on these reproductive and stratifying social processes.

Dispositions in their Own Words: "My Paycheque is More Than Your Mom's"

Brochures to promote RAP distributed in high schools across Alberta highlight money, work experience, and high school credits as the key advantages of participation. The brochure's cover reads "Earn while you learn." RAP is promoted as a way to

> become an apprentice and gain credits toward both an apprenticeship program and a high school diploma at the same time. It's like having it all! … Paid career training before you leave school.

These promises are not lost on those young people who have decided to enter the program. Nathan, who apprentices as an electrician in Edmonton, sums up all the key incentives when he explains what he liked about RAP and what motivated him to enter the program (Edmonton RAP Focus Group, October 22, 2002):

> Nathan: There's a lot of things that are for doing the RAP program. I mean, you get a 30-level course out of it if you complete all your hours. You do get credits out of it … and … as well as getting paid. And on top of that … you finish all your hours and you have your first year [of apprenticeship training] completed. You get out of school and you're a year ahead of all your other classmates. You're out there; you're making … you have a job already. You don't have to go out and decide what you want to do. You already have your mind made up. You're out there; you're working towards what you want to be doing for the rest of your life. I … I took a

> look at that and decided that by doing this, I would be ahead of most other people before I even got out of high school.

For some high school students, receiving credits for working becomes a lifeline. Curtis apprentices as an automotive mechanic and has severe problems with some of his high school courses. To him, participating in RAP does indeed increase the potential of successful graduation (Edmonton RAP Individual Interview, November 28, 2001):

> WL: And what did you like about [going into RAP as an automotive apprentice]? What sounded interesting to you?
> Curtis: Oh, for one thing, I get credits for it. And I need all the credits I can get.

While credits do play an important role in RAP students' decision to apprentice, their importance is quickly overshadowed by the reward of receiving a steady paycheque. Money becomes important in two ways: 1) earnings to afford certain lifestyles and to buy consumer goods; and 2) earning money while getting an education, rather than actually spending money to get an education. Nathan and Riley, two RAP students who had apprenticed as electrician and millwright respectively for some months by the time I spoke to them, comment on both reasons (Edmonton RAP Focus Group, October 22, 2002):

> WL: What were some of the things you liked most about RAP, what sold you on going into RAP?
> Riley: Paycheque at the end of the week.
> Nathan: Coming to school, you get your marks. But really, to me, the marks were just numbers on a piece of paper. I can write numbers on a piece of paper, too. Whereas I was going to work and after my first paycheque, it was just like "wow, hey", these are numbers, but these numbers can get me something. And they can get me something right now. And that's what really … that really hit home, I … I … I get up in the morning now, and it's like "oh, I got to go to school today." Whereas it was getting up in the morning, "yes, I can go to work today, and get some more money so that next paycheque I can go out and get this, or get that." You're

seeing something for what you're doing, and that's really what made the difference. I really liked working compared to school.

...

Riley: But if you think about it, when you go to university, ok, university costs way more than [technical school, for apprenticeship training], right? OK, now you got all the student loans. See with us, we go, we start work, right. Maybe it takes you four years to complete your university course, then you have to look for a job. After our four years, we're already up at 25 bucks an hour, if not 30. You're [university graduates] starting off at the bottom after your four years of trying to go up there. We, after our four years, can take another ticket and then we're up at like 40 dollars an hour.

Nathan: That's kind of how I looked at it, too. I mean, university ... you go every year and you pay 5,000 to 10,000 dollars. Whereas, you go and take a ticket, and in your first year ... I can easily make 5,000, 6,000, 7,000 dollars. Whereas that exact same money is what you will be paying to go to university. And after the first year, you go into your second year, you can easily make, you know, 8,000, 9,000, 10,000 dollars [with emphasis]. And I figured out by the time you're done university and by the time you've done your trade, university will have cost you somewhere around 20,000, 25,000 dollars, whereas in the trades, you could have made 30,000, 35,000, 40,000 dollars by the time. I mean, you're 80,000 dollars ahead of the other person.

Making an income not only becomes an important marker of maturity, but also of possible superiority over other high school students who decide to go on to college or university. Riley, the millwright apprentice, puts it rather succinctly when he comments on people who may question his choice to enter the trades (Edmonton RAP Focus Group, October 22, 2002):

Riley: I laugh at people [who study]. It's like, yeah, you work ...
Nathan: ... yeah, you think you're so smart ...
Riley: ... you work in a clothing store and you think you make lots of money. It's like, my paycheque is more than your mom's, don't talk to me.

Thus, earning a regular income is seen as asserting your status as a mature individual, able to chart a more discerning path on your life course, understanding your potential and what you are worth, but also increasingly defining who you are (Edmonton RAP Focus Group, February 11, 2002):

> Ted: Exactly, that's your money, you know. That's what I am. You know, you worked; you made that money, so you worked for what you have.

Despite the differences between Canada's training program and Germany's dual system, the youth apprentices in Bremen gave remarkably similar reasons for having chosen a career in the trades, as this excerpt from a focus group of electricians attests (Bremen Apprentices Focus Group, May 14, 2002):

> WL: Did any of you think about continuing at school?
> Sebastian: That wasn't an issue for me.
> WL: Why not?
> Sebastion: Don't know.
> Markus: Because I wasn't good enough at school. …
> Torsten: And you want to get your hands on money as soon as possible.
> …
> Sebastian: As a student at grammar school [*Gymnasium*], you have no money. You might get a bit of an allowance from your folks, maybe a small job on the side or so. You might get 200 Euro … no, that's already too much … maybe 100 Euro in a month or so. And we definitely get a bit more than that.
> Karl: And we also learn to really work. Not like them, packaging vegetables or whatever it is they do [laughs].

Initially, youth apprentices' accounts of their dispositions appear to centre on money (immediate or deferred) and, in the case of Edmonton youth apprentices, high school credits. However, none of the youth apprentices were exclusively motivated by these factors. In fact, the degree to which these young people based their decisions on future working conditions and other intrinsic motivators can be interpreted as reflecting their own agency. Consider Ron, a RAP student apprenticing as a motorcycle mechanic, who explains how his participation in RAP is an almost natural extension of his leisure activities and interests (Edmonton RAP Individual Interview, November 28, 2001):

> Ron: Hmm, the reason I chose [motorcycle mechanic] is because I race motor cross bikes in the summer and I sled a lot in the winter. So, I thought I knew enough about it and I might as well get paid to do something with them. … And I do everything on my own motorbikes. I always figured being a mechanic is something I already pretty much know so I might as well go see if I can learn a bit more and help myself and help my buddies who are at the track.

Apprentice car mechanics had the most enthusiastic attitudes toward their work. Even on the shop floor, young men and cars seem to be an irresistible combination. Particularly the German apprentices felt excited about getting involved in a career that is such an integral part of the country's economic success and its citizens' lifestyle (cars are considered a German's "dearest child") (Bremen Apprentices Focus Group, May 14, 2002):[34]

> WL: How did you decide to become car mechanics, what led to that?
> Klaus: Cars [general agreement] …
> Matthias: … fixing them up [*rumzuschrauben*] …
> WL: Always?
> Klaus: Since I've been seven.
> …
> Matthias: I think this is the best job for boys, because we all like to fix cars.
> …
> Steffen: After all, it really is a dream job.
> Matthias: Because it has to do with cars, and later you can fix them up and stuff like that.
> Klaus: You learn a lot for your own free time, if you have a car yourself and you want to work with that, then you know that through your job already.

Becoming a car mechanic is a choice that is generally well accepted and even admired. Many of the car mechanics have friends lining up to have their cars fixed for free. This also means there is little need to justify the decision to enter this field. Apprentices in other occupations, however, focus more on the working conditions or what doing this specific work means to them. Apprentices in hairdressing are a group that fights its negative stereotype by highlighting the good work environment and the personality it takes to be a good hairdresser. For instance, Joelle and Liz single out the "fun" work environment in which they get to work. But more importantly, they suggest that it takes a uniquely talented, creative personality to do well in their career (Edmonton RAP Focus Group, October 9, 2002):

> Joelle: Oh yeah, this profession is awesome for stuff like that. It's like not work. When you're having one of those days where you just laugh the whole day, because it's just … It's not like, I'd say, your desk job; it's fun.
>
> Liz: You have to be an outgoing person as a hairstylist. If you're just a plain, ordinary old Joe, you're not going to get very far in life, because if somebody comes and goes "do whatever you want", and you're like [with tired, whiny voice] "oh, we're just going to give you …" like zero cut, right. And it's like, you got to be fun, you got to be funky, you know.

In other words, the stereotype of hairdressing as being the best career choice for "dumb blondes" is stood on its head. In order to be successful, you have to be funky, creative, and outgoing. Or as Debbie, another Edmonton RAP student apprenticing in hairdressing puts it, doing hair is "more like an art" (Edmonton RAP Individual Interview, November 23, 2001).

What almost all apprentices do have in common when talking about their motivations and dispositions to enter the trades is the importance they place on doing what they consider "real," physical work. In turn, this real work they carry out is part of a

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[34] I have translated all the German interview and focus groups myself. I have tried to stay as true to the original narratives as possible, but also tried to translate them into what might be considered "natural" English.

real world, which stands in opposition to the "not real world" of education (either high school or university) or the "not real work" done in offices. Although I will discuss this theme in greater detail in one of the subsequent chapters, its relevance to youth apprentices' career decisions warrants at least a brief discussion at this point.

Keith talks about his preference for doing physical work and how this preference influenced his decision making. However, he extends this preference beyond the actual workplace into the personal realm by arguing that learning a trade will also make him more self-sufficient in later life, as he will have learned how to "fix stuff at home" (Edmonton RAP Individual Interview, November 27, 2001):

> WL: What made you know that you wanted to be in the trades?
> Keith: Um, I took apart a lot of stuff and I work with my hands better than I work with my head. Although you do need your head, but … it's not as stressful as when you use your head. 'Cause, say, me being a lawyer, no way. There's no way I'm going to be a lawyer. And … I'm not gonna be sitting in an office. I want to be moving around, I want to be getting stronger every day I work because I'm lifting stuff. I want to be able to fix stuff at home. I want to be able to be useful at my own home, like say … "oh man, a breaker blew out …, oh, I know how to do that, I can fix it, I don't have to call anybody." So, I just want to know … I don't know, that's my basic thought pattern. And the pay is good. [laughs]

Anne, a young Bremen woman who chose an apprenticeship in hairdressing over continuing her secondary education and entering a white-collar career explains her choice in similar terms (Bremen Apprentices Focus Groups, May 7, 2002):

> Anne: Actually, my parents were happy about my choice [to become a hairdresser], because it was always obvious that I'm not the type who wants to go to school for a long time. Not that I'm dumb or that I'm not interested in learning, but … I'm not the type to sit around all day. Really, I have to do something that allows me to move around.

On the surface, my interview and focus group data suggest that academic-track high school students are less concerned than youth apprentices about the income potential of their career plans. Most academic students say they want a job that provides satisfying work and has intrinsic value to them. While heavy physical work is not an attractive alternative, they also show a distaste for mind-numbing "cubicle work" that is similar to that expressed by youth apprentices (Edmonton RAP Focus Group, February 13, 2002):

> Alissa: That's what my dad does, too. He works for the government, ... I actually went on a job shadow with him in Grade 9 and I still don't know what he does. He's some sort of a manager, he works with computers, but … he told me, whatever you do, don't bother getting like … don't get a cubicle job, because it's not very satisfying. And he's been there for coming close to 20 years … I wouldn't want to just sit in a cubicle all day, doing the same thing over and over. He told me, whatever you do, don't … don't get yourself into that kind of a position, 'cause … you know. And it's the kind of thing, you get into a job like that and, the pay is OK, you work alright hours, you just don't bother to leave. Instead of going out and trying to find something that you'll find more satisfying. You don't bother to leave it, so you end up staying there for twenty years.

Maureen, an Edmonton high school student planning to attend university probably says it best in her movie analogy (Edmonton Academic Focus Group, February 13, 2002):

> Maureen: You know movies, I use this all the time, movies you see once and you're like "this is a great movie," but then you think about watching it again and you don't really want to. But then there's movies you could see a whole bunch of times. Whatever I do, it will be the movie I see a whole bunch of times.

Sonja, a Bremen *Gymnasium* student who plans to study biology at university, explains how it is much more important to have a job that is fun, as long as you do not become poor doing it (Bremen Academic Focus Group, May 29, 2002):

> Sonja: … I mean, you don't want to live in poverty. You should have at least some money. But … I would rather do something I like, that is fun. I know a few people here [at school] who want to study business or computing, because they think they can make a lot of money. That absolutely does not interest me, and that's why I don't want to study stuff like that. I'd rather have less money and be happy with a job I really like, than having a lot of money and a job I don't like.

These respondents' focus on the importance of having fun in a job, in contrast to making a lot of money, is representative of the conversations I had with academic high school students in Edmonton. However, as the interviews and focus groups progressed, it became clear that extrinsic motivators do still play a very important role for academic-track students, even though this role may not be as readily and immediately acknowledged as it is by youth apprentices. For some, like Alissa, who had earlier in the focus group talked about her plans to study anthropology and sociology and the importance of being fulfilled in your job over having stability, the relationship between extrinsic and intrinsic rewards that a future career may offer is nevertheless recognized as a potential conflict (Edmonton Academic Focus Group, February 13, 2002):

> Alissa: … I think that's probably one of the biggest qualifiers that I want, is a job that I don't want to run screaming from after working there for too many years. And … I want to make money in my job, whatever I do, but I don't want it to be the main issue. I want to have enough to live comfortably, but I don't want to have to, you know, quit my job and go get higher pay for something I don't want to do. So, I think being happy is probably the biggest thing. Or being, you know, OK with my job.

Some of Alissa's German academic counterparts are concerned with finding a balance between having fun at work ("*es muss Spass machen*") and making money and having some security and stability. Consider Barbara, who is most interested in a creative, artistic career. Although Barbara understands the volatility of the field she wants to enter (or maybe because she does), she also expresses more desire for a stable and well-paying career than did the other members of the focus group who had more traditional career ambitions (Bremen Academic Focus Group, May 29, 2002):

> Barbara: Well, for me it is important that there is some stability, that I will have, in a way, a steady income. I won't have that as an independent artist. I would have to find my own contracts and would have to be able to hold my own in this competitive environment. And that scares me.

This tension between intrinsic and extrinsic rewards in their future careers is further confirmed by quantitative data I gathered through the background survey (Appendix F, Question 19). Study participants were asked to rate (on a five-point scale, with one being "not important at all" and five being "very important") the importance of a number of extrinsic and intrinsic benefits to their future career goals. Table 27 shows that there were no statistically significant differences between youth apprentices and academic-track high school students in the importance they accorded extrinsic benefits like job security and pay. In fact, academic-track students actually rated these two benefits as slightly more important than did youth apprentices.

Table 27. Select Work Values by Type of Program, Edmonton and Bremen Combined

	Apprentices	Academic-track	Total
Job Security			
Not Important	11 18%	2 5%	13 13%
Important	51 82%	38 95%	89 87%
Total	62 100%	40 100%	102 100%
Pay			
Not Important	21 33%	8 20%	29 29%
Important	42 67%	32 80%	74 72%
Total	63 100%	40 100%	103 100%
Interesting and Challenging Work			
Not Important	12 19%	3 7%	15 15%
Important	50 81%	37 93%	87 85%
Total	62 100%	40 100%	102 100%
Opportunities to Learn New Skills			
Not Important	2 3%	7 17%	9 9%
Important	60 97%	33 83%	93 91%
Total*	62 100%	40 100%	102 100%

Respondents were asked: "Below are a number of reasons why people choose certain careers. How important are these for your own career goals?" They answered using a five-point scale,with "1" meaning "not important at all," and "5" meaning "very important." Responses of one to three were recoded as "not important," responses of four and five were recoded as "important."

* Differences significant at the p<0.05 level

In contrast, youth apprentices expressed significantly more interest in careers offering opportunities to learn new skills. These quantitative findings may be somewhat surprising, since, in interviews and focus groups, youth apprentices placed more emphasis on having a steady income while academic-track students talked more about intrinsic rewards of their future careers. Two factors might explain these differences. First, academic-track high school students might be fairly confident in their higher income potential and therefore did not stress this is as much during interviews and focus groups. Second, youth apprentices have already made the transition into employment and actually receive the steady paycheques about which they speak. Receiving a steady income, as opposed to speculating about it, obviously has a more immediate effect on an individual's life course and his/her perception on the importance of this income. Similarly, youth apprentices' greater emphasis on the intrinsic benefit of learning new skills is most likely related to the fact that they are already working and that their position in the workplace is characterized by applied learning. In other words, learning new skills at work is the key element of being an apprentice.

When controlling for location (see Table 28), the different attitudes of youth apprentices and academic-track students observed in Table 27 remained essentially unchanged for either location, although the relatively small sample size made it difficult to reach statistical significance. Percentage difference still show that academic-track students placed slightly more emphasis on job security, pay and interesting work, but slightly less on opportunities to learn new skills. However, there were also differences between the Edmonton and Bremen sub-samples.

Table 28. Select Work Values by Type of Program and Location

	Edmonton			Bremen		
	Apprentices	Academic-track	Total	Apprentices	Academic-track	Total
Job Security						
Not Important	3 11%	1 4%	4 8%	8 23%	1 6%	9 17%
Important	24 89%	22 96%	46 92%	27 77%	16 94%	43 83%
Total	27 100%	23 100%	50 100%	35 100%	17 100%	52 100%
Pay						
Not Important	3 11%	2 9%	5 10%	18 50%	6 35%	24 45%
Important	24 89%	21 91%	45 90%	18 50%	11 65%	29 55%
Total	27 100%	23 100%	50 100%	36 100%	17 100%	53 100%
Interesting and Challenging Work						
Not Important	6 22%	3 13%	9 18%	6 17%	0 0%	6 11%
Important	28 78%	20 87%	41 82%	29 83%	17 10%	46 89%
Total	27 100%	23 100%	50 100%	35 100%	17 100%	52 100%
Opportunities to Learn New Skills						
Not Important	2 7%	5 22%	7 14%	0 0%	2 12%	2 4%
Important	25 93%	18 78%	43 86%	35 100%	15 88%	50 96%
Total	27 100%	23 100%	50 100%	35 100%	17 100%	52 100%*

Respondents were asked: "Below are a number of reasons why people choose certain careers. How important are these for your own career goals?" They answered using a five-point Likert scale, with "1" meaning "not important at all," and "5" meaning "very important." Responses of one to three were recoded as "not important," responses of four and five were recoded as "important."

* Differences significant at the $p<0.05$ level

The percentage differences in Table 28 show that youth apprentices in Edmonton were more likely than those in Bremen to stress job security and, particularly, pay. Although there was no discernable percentage difference for the academic sub-samples in terms of job security, Edmonton academic-track students were also more likely than those in Bremen to consider pay an important element of their future career. In terms of interesting work and opportunities to learn new skills, the relationship was reversed. Bremen apprentices and academic-track students rated these rewards higher than the study participants from Edmonton. The greater emphasis placed on job security and pay by Edmonton youth apprentices contradicts the current economic realities in the two countries. While Alberta is experiencing a shortage of skilled workers in the trades (see Chapter 2), Germany is in a period of recession which has also led to a decline in construction and industrial activity. How, then, might the cross-national differences in Table 28 be explained?

Both the novelty of RAP, and the fact that it is promoted as a non-academic pathway to a stable and well-paying career, suggest that these issues are foremost on the minds of the young people entering RAP. The interview and focus group data I discussed earlier in this chapter certainly confirm this assumption. In contrast, the dual system in Germany has long been firmly entrenched in both the labour market and the educational system. Its benefits in terms of income and job security, although currently threatened by a recession, are neither in need of promotion, nor are they questioned. The streamed secondary school system puts university out of immediate reach for most youth apprentices, and unskilled labour is not a viable alternative in Germany's highly regulated labour market. The benefits of participating in the dual system (and the disadvantages of not participating) in terms of job security and income potential are well understood and may therefore have not been noted as importantly by the Bremen youth apprentices. Also, Bremen youth apprentices have already left the secondary school system and may therefore not see the need to define working in the trades as a rejection of high school's intellectual and academic purposes. Rather, Bremen youth apprentices appear to see their apprenticeship as predominantly a form of learning. This finds expression in the fact that, compared to youth apprentices in Edmonton, they placed more emphasis on opportunities to learn new skills and challenging work.

Summary

My second research question asked who participates in academic high school programs and youth apprenticeships and how the participants in the two streams are different (e.g., in terms of class, gender, and cultural capital). The findings presented in this chapter clearly show that SES, whether measured by parents' level of education, parents' occupational status, or family income, predicts dispositions toward post-high school plans. Thus my findings replicate what other researchers have observed about social origin and educational attainment (see Chapter 3). Social class continues to have a powerful influence on dispositions toward higher post-secondary education or employment. Specifically, young people from more educated and more affluent backgrounds are less likely to choose to be apprentices.

While these findings are evidence of the reproduction of class-based inequality in transitions from high school, they also suggest some social mobility. The Edmonton academic-track sub-sample included a substantial percentage of students whose parents' educational attainment was below university-level. Similarly, the relatively high number of youth apprentices in Edmonton with parents with limited education and lower-skill occupations (according to NOC) indicates that the employment and income prospects associated with a ticket in the trades is seen to improve individuals' SES. However, some questions remain as to whether this social mobility constitutes *structural mobility*, reflecting a general upward trend over time in educational and occupational attainment (see Collins 1979 on credential society) or a form of *circulatory mobility* that reflects individual investment in education (Krahn and Lowe 2002, 125).

By using two different measures of cultural capital, I was able to look more closely at the dynamics of these structurally reproductive processes. Participants who reported lower levels of cultural capital were more likely to be in the youth apprentice sub-samples, as were participants who reported that they grew up in homes in which parents' placed a lot of emphasis on manual skills, rather than artistic and intellectual skills. While the influence of cultural capital was very similar in both Edmonton and Bremen, a closer look at cultural capital as formed and perpetuated in the home did reveal some significant differences between young people in the two cities. My analysis suggests that these differences can be attributed to institutional differences in the education system. Together with the analysis of socio-economic background, these findings regarding cultural capital support the widely held belief that Germany's heavily streamed tripartite school system and the role of the dual system within it result in a much more "effective" reproduction of social inequality than does, for instance, the Canadian comprehensive school system (cf., Kerckhoff 1995).

However, examination of individuals' own accounts of their dispositions regarding their career plans begins to complicate the conclusions drawn from these quantitative findings of reproduction of structural inequality. In subsequent chapters, I will begin to interpret participants' narratives, but in this chapter I accepted their narratives at face value, since I wanted to understand individuals' own perception of the interplay between structure and agency. This initial analysis of the qualitative data addresses research question 3 which asked: *To what extent do young people themselves perceive their participation in either academic high school programs or youth apprenticeships as shaped by structural elements or as the result of active choice?*

Youth apprentices' comments about getting paid for education (rather than having to pay for it), getting a head start into a career, and still receiving high school credits bring to mind notions of rational choice (see Chapter 3) such as those theorized by Goldthorpe (1996) or Boudon (1974). However, the data also demonstrated how youth apprentices and academic-track students considered both intrinsic and extrinsic factors when choosing their careers (or when considering the careers they hoped to choose), suggesting that rational choice calculations alone cannot explain dispositions and outcomes of young people's transitions from high school. Granted, in interviews and focus groups youth apprentices strongly emphasized the monetary advantages and the long-term career potential of their choices. However, they also stressed their interest in the particular type of work they had chosen, a preference for manual labour in general, and the relationships with colleagues at work. These findings are congruent with Brown's (1987) critique of rational choice theory (see Chapter 3), namely that non-monetary rewards are more important to decision making than an understanding of the cost-benefit relation of possible alternatives.

The discussions in this chapter also reflect findings of recent German (Berger et al. 2000; Berger 1998; Durrer and Heine 1998) and Canadian (Lowe and Krahn 2000) research about occupational aspirations and motivations. For instance, German *Gymnsasium* graduates were found to rank the intrinsic benefits of their future career, such as interesting and fulfilling work, as more important for their decision making than, for instance, employment stability (Durrer and Heine 1998). Analyzing data from a large quantitative study on young Germans' occupational dispositions, Berger, Brandes, and Walden (2000) found evidence of high occupational aspirations and a strong work ethic, regardless of the type of secondary school from which young people had graduated. Such findings contradict Solga and Wagner's (2001) hypothesis that the educational and social milieu of the *Hauptschule* disadvantages students in that the attitudes of school mates and teachers, and the restrictive nature of curriculum circumscribe the development of aspirations and beliefs in one's own abilities (ibid., 111).

However, despite the rather optimistic tone of participants in my study and the dominance of narratives of agency, the quantitative evidence that participation in either youth apprenticeships or academic-track programs was still largely determined by SES makes a powerful argument for the reproduction of social inequality. Furthermore, the comparison between the Bremen and Edmonton sub-samples did suggest differences rooted in the structures of the education systems and labour markets of the two countries that highlight the importance of institutional structures on transition dispositions. In order to obtain a more complete understanding of the interrelationship between structure and agency in school-work transitions, it is therefore necessary to pay careful attention not only to what young people themselves say and believe, but also to analyze the social and institutional contexts in which these decisions were made.

Chapter 6

Institutional Context: "And It Was Kind of Hard to Get Information"

In Chapter 2, I discussed the German dual system and the tripartite secondary education system on which it is built. This heavily-streamed system is very different from the Canadian system where, despite variations from province to province, the majority of students attend comprehensive schools. Furthermore, the two countries have decidedly different post-secondary education and labour market structures and institutions. In this chapter, I will investigate whether young people perceive these institutional arrangements as either enabling or restricting their transitions from high school. However, I will first discuss the concepts of *transparency* and *flexibility*, since they form the basis for understanding the institutional differences that frame school-work transitions in Canada and Germany.

Transparency and Flexibility

Hamilton and Hurrelmann (1994, 331) define transparency as "how well young people can see through the system to plot a course from where they are in the present to a distant future goal." Transparency of structures is obviously related to the potential for agency. Reflexive and active engagement requires that individuals understand the context in which they have to make decisions and in which they have to act. However, social structures that are too rigid, despite an abundance of transparency, may restrict the options available to individuals. Both Germany's hierarchical education system and its highly regulated labour market have been described as having very transparent, yet also very rigid and inflexible structures (Geißler 1991). Through early streaming and specialization in school, and by restricting access to most jobs to those with official credentials, the German system sends very clear signals to young people as to the transition paths that have to be taken to achieve specific career goals. Yet, once set on a path, change becomes relatively difficult.

The other half of this duality, flexibility, can also be seen as a prerequisite for agency. Flexibility allows, if not requires, individuals to consider alternative paths and to engage in reflexive risk taking that nonetheless leaves room to renegotiate or to retract. However, too much flexibility may actually be problematic, opening up a bewildering set of options, difficult to comprehend and navigate without proper understanding of a specific decision's consequences. Too much flexibility obscures transparency and limits the capacity to understand and thus reflexively engage with the social environment. School-work transitions in Canada, or more generally the relationship between educational credentials and their applicability in the labour market, have been described as being unconnected and opaque, to the particular detriment of youth who do not participate in higher post-secondary education (Lehmann 2000). As there are few clear, obvious connections between school achievement and the labour market, planning for the future and even high school course selection is difficult and arbitrary (Hamilton and Hurrelman 1994, 338).

Flexibility over Transparency: The Canadian System

While programs like RAP increase flexibility and choice by adding an alternative to mainstream academic options, proponents of the program have also argued that it makes the labour market and career options more transparent at an earlier stage. High school students receive information about RAP and careers in the trades through presentations in their schools made by representatives from *Careers: The Next Generation* (CNG), the industry-based foundation promoting RAP in Alberta. They also have access to training and labour market information in their schools' libraries and resource centres. Individual students may be encouraged to look into the program by teachers or counsellors. Yet, for many RAP students, knowledge about the program, how it works, and what the requirements and the long-term career prospects are, remains rather elusive. Tim, who apprentices as a millwright in Edmonton, provides a good example of the rather confused and incomplete understanding of Alberta's apprenticeship system on which most RAP students base their decisions to enter the program (Edmonton RAP Individual Interview, November 22, 2001):

> Tim: It was kind of difficult at first, because talking to some of the people at school [teachers and counsellors] about it, they kind of were talking to me up at their level. And I did not really understand what they were talking about.
>
> ...
>
> WL: Ah, just tell me a little more about that. Did they try to discourage you to do this or did they try to encourage you?
>
> Tim: No, they encouraged me to do it, it's just that I wasn't really sure on what to do because I had never done something like this before. ... And it was kind of hard to get information from them.
>
> WL: OK. Do you think that was because they didn't know themselves what RAP would mean because it's a fairly new program?
>
> Tim: Yeah. That could be it.

This lack of understanding of apprenticeship structures and employment conditions needs to be considered when attributing agency to the choices and decisions of RAP participants (see Chapter 5). It appears that agency is most likely expressed by those who individually seek further information to inform their choices, or who have access to credible role models (e.g., individuals with experience in the chosen occupation). Carl, an

Edmonton RAP student, provides an example of what appears to be a very determined and informed decision-making process (Edmonton RAP Individual Interview, December 3, 2001):

> WL: To become an underwater welder … First of all, … let's put it this way, I would assume that you are planning to finish your apprenticeship once you're done high school and get your ticket.
> Carl: Yeah.
> WL: How much longer will that take?
> Carl: Uh, this summer, I'm writing my first year [exams]. And then the summer of Grade 12 I'll get my second year, and the year after I'll get my journeyman.
> WL: So, you will get your journeyman certification a year after you complete high school?
> Carl: Yeah.
> WL: To become an underwater welder, do you have to take a lot of extra education?
> Carl: Well, there is an engineering course. And by then I need to renew my scuba diving licence. And then there is basically a ten-month course for underwater welder.
> WL: And who runs that? Do you know?
> Carl: Well, there is a really good place in London. And then there is a couple of places …
> WL: Is that London, England?
> Carl: Yeah. … and then there is a couple of places in Vancouver and Victoria. And then there is two places, [local community college] has one. …They just started last year. I'm not sure how good it is, or whatever. And then [technical college] in Calgary, they have one, too.
> WL: Is it very difficult to get into these programs?
> Carl: Uh no, not really. My company I'm working for right now, they will pay for my education, for the test and all that, for just like on-land welding. And the time I miss from work and school, if I get above 70 percent on the test, they pay me for that time I missed.

In contrast, Stephen, an Edmonton RAP student apprenticing in landscaping, is almost completely unaware of the conditions and requirements of apprenticing, even though he had already been registered and working as an apprentice for some time when I spoke to him (Edmonton RAP Individual Interview, November 26, 2002):

WL: OK. Let's talk a little bit about your decision to go into RAP. How did you find out about it?
Stephen: Well, in classrooms they were talking about it. So, yeah, that's how I found out about it.
WL: Who is they?
Stephen: Hm, I forget.
...
WL: OK. What did they tell you about it that interested you?
Stephen: About the credits. Work experience and everything.
...
WL: Did you find your employer yourself, or did the school find it for you?
Stephen: Like ... what do you mean by that?
WL: Some of the other people I talked to say that Mr. [workplace co-ordinator] contacted an employer for the placement. And other students have gone out and found an employer themselves and then came to Mr. [workplace coordinator] and said I want to work for that company.
Stephen: [pause] ... I don't know.
WL: You don't know?
Stephen: No.
WL: How did you decide on working for this specific company?
Stephen: I don't know.
WL: How did you know about them?
Stephen: [pause] ... like who?
WL: Your employer? How did you come together, you and your employer?
Stephen: [pause] ... I don't know.
...
WL: Once you graduate from high school, how much longer before you will finish your apprenticeship?
Stephen: [pause] .. just probably during that year, I don't know. I'm not really sure yet.
...
WL: And then once you're done with your apprenticeship, once you get your ticket, will you be working in the same field?
Stephen: Hmm, I don't know really. I'm not sure yet.

During the interview, it became clear that Stephen was actually apprenticing in his parents' landscaping business, which is probably why he had such a problem making sense of my questions about finding employment. Clearly, there is little to no evidence of agency, or informed choice, in Stephen's account of deciding to become a landscaping apprentice. This lack of understanding of essential institutional features of apprenticing is often compounded by the roles that teachers, counsellors, and work placement co-ordinators play in the decision-making process. These adults often assume the responsibility of placing RAP participants with employers. On the surface, this appears like a valuable service to offer to interested students, but it also significantly limits the potential for choice and agency. Tim spoke earlier about the difficulty of getting information about RAP and apprenticing from teachers and counsellors. Here he comments on how he decided on both the occupation in which to apprentice and the employer for whom he is working (Edmonton RAP Individual Interview, November 22, 2001):

> WL: How did you decide on a specific employer and on a specific trade?
> Tim: Because the school found me the place … where I'd be working. And they just … The place where I'm working right now, they looked at what I was apprenticing for and they just put me in a certain spot in the building, in a department.

Other RAP apprentices tell similar stories in which the final decision to apprentice in a specific occupation merely reflected where the school was able to find an employer willing to take on the student (Edmonton RAP Individual Interview, December 3, 2001):

> WL: And how did you decide on heavy-duty mechanic?
> Max: Well, I actually wanted to do three things. Automotive mechanic, heavy duty mechanic or auto body repair person. And the one that I decided on was heavy-duty mechanic.
> WL: Why was that? Because an employer was found in that area, or did you make a decision?
> Max: That's were the employer was found.
> WL: So, it could have gone either way, depending on who they found?
> Max: Yeah.

Transparency over Flexibility: The German System

In Germany, transparency is central to the close relationship between a streamed, tri-partite secondary school system and an occupationally structured labour market.

Transparency is maintained by an extensive and impressive network of federal employment centres (*Arbeitsamt*) which engage in vocational counselling and assist in placement. Students in any of the three secondary school types are also required to participate in at least two internships. Ilka, one of the Bremen academic high school students, talks about the range of contacts and information services she has used to form dispositions about post-secondary plans (Bremen Academic Focus Group, May 29, 2002)

> Ilka: For me it was a number of things. We have a vocational counselling service here at school, and … well, I was always sure that I wanted to do something with children, but I just didn't know what exactly. I did an internship in a day care and … well, that wasn't enough for me, with the money and the demands, although I actually quite liked the age. And then I spoke with this woman, and she said "Why don't you study primary education, that is a fairly young age as well and you could bring in your skills and interests." Then I had information about the job sent to me, read through all that, and really liked it a lot. I told everybody about it and actually received a lot of support.

Despite its early streaming processes and their initially limiting impact on agency, the greater transparency of the German education system and labour market thus opens up *Handlungsspielraum* (room for agency). In other words, finding oneself in a certain location in the social structure, or to use Bourdieu's term *field* (for instance in the upper school stream, like Ilka), and having access to a multitude of well-established information sources creates an understanding of a range of options open to individuals. Although these options are limited by the initial streaming process, this limitation itself provides a framework in which knowledge about structures and consequences of choices enables agency. Obviously, this range is greater for those graduating from the upper school stream (*Gymnasium*). But even the far more limited range of occupational opportunities for graduates from the lower streams (*Hauptschule* and *Realschule*) appears to create conditions to enact agency, as the labour market sends very clear signals to individuals regarding the credentials needed to enter specific careers (Bremen Apprentices Focus Group, May 14, 2002):

> WL: Did any of you ever think about going to work right after school, without an apprenticeship? I mean, you could probably make more money right away.
> [all: no]
> Kai: Yeah, but only shitty work …
> Karl: Yes, and no prospects for employment later.
> Kai: If you're unemployed, what can you do then?
> Karl: Yeah, doing an apprenticeship is absolutely necessary.
> Kai: I'd agree.

Understanding of these structures is aided by a number of public agencies and institutional arrangements (like the *Arbeitsamt*), compulsory internships in secondary schools, counselling services in schools, and generally the co-operation between education, industry, and unions in matters of vocational education. Furthermore, the central importance and the long-standing tradition of these institutions, services, programs, and relationships further guarantees that most young people will have somebody to talk to who has gone the same route, either in their family, or within their group of relatives, friends and acquaintances, their schools, or their community. Consider, for instance, the following conversation with two young Bremen participants, both apprenticing to be chefs and explaining how their interest in this career arose (Bremen Apprentices Focus Group, May 17, 2002):

> Hans: Well, I got interested in this because both my parents work full time and I had no choice. I had to cook at home. And after a while it really was fun. And then I started getting interested in it as an occupation and started to look into it further. At first, I didn't really want to do it because of the hours you work as a chef. But then I thought, you'll probably get used to that, and I actually did get used to it pretty fast. And it really is a lot of fun.

WL: Where and how did you find out about this occupation?
Hans: At the *Arbeitsamt* and with relatives. One of my friends is also working as a chef.
WL: Did it help talking with others who also work in this area?
Hans: Yeah, that helped a lot, because I really had no idea what this is all about. That it is really quite exhausting, that you have to work a lot of overtime, and that you won't have a lot of free time left.
Maria: As I said earlier, I did a number of different internships at school.
WL: All in different areas?
Maria: Yeah, and of all the jobs I tried, I liked cooking the best.
WL: May I ask what the other occupations were?
Maria: For example, I did an internship in a day care as a child care worker, and also one in retail. Working as a chef was the only one I really liked, I'd have to say.
WL: Without the internships, would you have considered becoming a chef at all?
Maria: I don't think so.

Like Maria, a number of other Bremen apprentices decided about their occupation through internships at school. Thomas, a Bremen automobile mechanic who had graduated from the *Hauptschule*, claims that he never cared much about cars. He only got interested in automotive mechanics after he realized, during his first internship in house painting, that he has a fear of heights. So he tried a second internship in a garage.

Internships for the purpose of career exploration play a far more important role in the curriculum of the two lower school streams (for instance, *Hauptschule* graduates like Thomas need to complete at least two internships). Even so, the *Gymnasium* requirement to complete one internship is still an important way to gather insights into potential careers (Bremen Academic Interviews, May 24, 2002):

Simone: Well, I did my internship with a lawyer, because I was undecided between law and medicine. But now, I'm really turned off the law profession. It seemed quite boring, always sitting at a desk, writing, and so on. I don't know. And that's why I now tend more toward going into medicine.

The vocational counselling services of the German *Arbeitsamt* also fulfills important functions in informing students about different occupations, in increasing their understanding of requirements in specific careers, and in assisting individuals with finding employers. Ellen, a hairdressing apprentice talks about her experiences with the vocational counsellor at her local *Arbeitsamt* (Bremen Apprentices Focus Group, May 7, 2002):

> WL: Does anybody else have any experiences with counsellors at the *Arbeitsamt*?
> Ellen: Yeah, the person I visited was quite helpful … but also because I already …, well, I only went there once I already had a pretty good idea what I wanted to be, and then he was able to tell me about the prerequisites, how to apply, where the vocational schools are, and so on. He did tell me those types of things and printed a lot of information for me.

Ellen obviously had concrete ideas about what she wanted to do and was in need of more specific and concrete information about her career choice. Others, like Atilla and Frank, both apprenticing in a metal trade, benefitted from the services offered at their local *Arbeitsamt* in a multitude of ways (Bremen Apprentices Focus Group, May 30, 2002):

> Atilla: Yeah, I watched a film [about workers in the metal trades], and I really liked that. How they were standing at the lathe.
> WL: Did you also talk to a counsellor at the *Arbeitsamt*?
> Frank: Yes.
> WL: Was that helpful?
> Frank: Yeah, it really was. Without him, I wouldn't have my apprenticeship right now. He sent me all that stuff. Like, he made some suggestions [about different kinds of occupations in the metal trades], and then he sent me all this information material about them. Because, I didn't know what all these different jobs were. And then I worked through all that material, and finally made my decision in the end.

Not all German participants were as happy about their experiences with the *Arbeitsamt*. Particularly those with higher levels of education found the services at the *Arbeitsamt* rather useless, as the following conversation between Simone and Silke, both students at a Bremen *Gymnasium*, attests (Bremen Academic Focus Group, May 24, 2002):

> Simone: OK, we all went to the career library at the *Arbeitsamt*, from the school here. But that was quite stupid. You could enter your interests and stuff into a computer, and then you would get a list with occupations. It had primary school teacher for math, and such crap on it. Stuff that doesn't interest me at all. It wasn't very good, or useful.
>
> Silke: Yeah, the computers she just talked about, I used them too. And it printed out that I should become a math teacher, or something in engineering. But I found that very funny, as I'm almost failing math [laughs].

Although Simone and Silke felt that the *Arbeitsamt* was not of much help to them, they did make use of some of its services. And in some roundabout ways, the "stupid" and "funny" results of the computer printouts probably did help confirm a set of dispositions toward career areas that they had already been forming. However, despite the greater transparency of the German system, its complement of institutional features and services, and its potential to create *Handlungsspielraum* (room for agency) for graduates from all three school streams, it can also be interpreted as constraining.

Institutional Context as Constraining

Despite the more transparent linkages between education and the labour market in Germany, its network of information centres, and its compulsory internships during secondary schooling, many young people still enter occupational paths based on largely untested assumptions and beliefs about different types of work. Connie is a young German woman who graduated from the German *Realschule* and now apprentices as a hairdresser. Here, Connie talks about her earlier plans to continue her schooling and to subsequently embark on a white collar career, and about why she ultimately decided to abandon these plans to apprentice as a hairdresser (Bremen Apprentices Focus Group, May 7, 2002):

> WL: Did you originally have other career plans?
>
> Connie: Yes, I actually wanted to be [*Speditionskauffrau*; administrative assistant in transportation] and I did apply in that area. … I did an internship with [company name] and they would have taken me on as an apprentice, and that was fine with me. But then I started thinking that I would like to do something more creative and I figured that hairdressing would be OK. Why not try that. At that point, I didn't think about money. You live with your parents. That's totally … you have some delusions and you think, man, it'll all be great, you'll be really famous … [laughs] … you'll be standing on a stage cutting hair and … Well, it wasn't like that. As I said, I started working in a salon, and right away, it was a total reality check. Now, I really have … well, I think I'll finish the apprenticeship for sure, that's certain, I won't quit. But afterwards, I'll either continue with school or I'll do something totally different, maybe also try university or something. I'll have to see.
>
> WL: Well, you almost answered my question. Do you regret your decision to become a hairdresser?
>
> Connie: Well, if I had known how this job really works, I might have done something different. … My brother is now starting university. … he was actually the only one who right away told me "no, don't do that, you can't be a hairdresser." Yeah, now that he's at university, I'm starting to have my doubts … I'm starting to think, is time going to run out? He is starting at university, and, well … you're still doing an apprenticeship.

Connie's expectation to work creatively, to become famous and to cut hair on a stage, in front of an audience, is obviously nowhere near the everyday experiences of almost all hairdressers. To some extent, it can be argued that increased individualization, a decline in the deterministic force of social structure, and other conditions of late modernity as discussed by social theorists like Beck (1986) and Giddens (1990) have created conditions in Germany that are more akin to the Canadian experience. In other words, perhaps the transparency inherent in a system that rather effectively reproduced social inequality by streaming young people into career paths according to their social origin is being replaced by flexibility and individualization, as the educational system has expanded and opened up more alternatives, particularly for the lower middle classes. However, as Beck's notion of risk society and Connie's story above suggests, this increased flexibility does come with certain risks. I will take up a discussion of individualization and risk later in this dissertation. For now, it is important to highlight the inflexible, constraining and reproductive capacities of Germany's education system.

Streaming

Despite its potential to create *Handlungsspielraum*, Germany's transparent yet inflexible dual system can often lead to transitions that are hardly motivated by interest and disposition. In some cases, the plethora of regulations and standards leads to situations in which young people are forced into certain apprenticeships despite very different dispositions. Bulcin, a young Turkish woman apprenticing as a hairdresser in Bremen, talks about her dislike of hair, even though she has begrudgingly accepted the need to complete this apprenticeship to fulfil her real career ambition of becoming a make-up artist (Bremen Apprentices Focus Group, May 7, 2002):

> Bulcin: I want to become a make-up artist. I went to the *Arbeitsamt* and they told me that if you want to become a make-up artist, you have to apprentice as a hairdresser first and get two years work experience in a salon. OK, so I said I'll do the three year apprenticeship, because then I'll have a ticket … that's why. Other than that, I didn't want to become a hairdresser. … A friend of mine, she has a salon with her uncle. At first, I would go there for almost a year to see what they do. And all that fucking hair, lying everywhere. I thought that was the shits. I couldn't even touch hair.

Bulcin ultimately understood the advantage of doing the internship in order to fulfil her true career goal. Anja, who also apprentices as a hairdresser, is an example of somebody whose agency is almost completely circumscribed by institutional and cultural factors. In Germany, entering the labour market as an unskilled worker is a more severe disadvantage than in Canada. Completing at least an apprenticeship is seen as a minimal requirement for success in the life course. For some, like Anja, the actual occupation in which one apprentices is almost no longer important (Bremen Apprentices Focus Group, May 7, 2002):

> WL: How did you decide on becoming a hairdresser?
> Anja: Because I couldn't get anything else.
> WL: What did you try first, or what did you want to do at first?
> Anja: I honestly had no idea what to do. I sent off about 45 applications, everywhere … like administrative assistant, and also hairdressing, and other stuff. And nobody responded, and the salon where I work now was the only employer who contacted me. And then I started right away.

Although Anja expressed her disillusionment with her schooling, she actually graduated from *Realschule*. Consequently, she is already in a better position to compete for an apprenticeship than those who graduated from the lowest school stream, the *Hauptschule*. In the earlier description of the dual system, I alluded to a process commonly known as displacement competition. Because of increasing levels of educational attainment made possible through expansion of the education system in the '70s, graduates from the *Hauptschule* have become disadvantaged for apprenticeship positions. Here is a sample of quotes from apprentices who graduated from the *Hauptschule*.

(Bremen Apprentices Focus Group, May 22, 2002, roofers):
Oliver: Automotive mechanics, I once tried that out in an internship.
WL: And you didn't like it?
Oliver: Well, I was told that it wouldn't work, you need to have *Realschule* to get into that. And that was that for me.

(Bremen Apprentices Focus Group, May 14, 2002, electricians):
Torsten: Initially, I wanted to apprentice as a *Mechatroniker* [a new occupation combining electronics and computing], but they wouldn't accept me with only *Hauptschule*.

(Bremen Apprentices Focus Group, May 30, 2002, metal workers):
WL: How difficult was it to find an apprenticeship position?
Atilla: I wasted three years before I found one. After Grade 9, with my *Hauptschule* diploma, I wanted to start an apprenticeship. Couldn't find anything. Then I participated in [lists a number of federally sponsored pre-apprenticeship programs for young people with trouble finding apprenticeships], still couldn't find anything.

Recent statistics indeed show that graduates from the *Hauptschule* stream are no longer the majority in the dual system. Of all German apprentices in 1999, 36 percent had graduated from the *Realschule*, versus 30 percent from the *Hauptschule* (16 percent did have *Abitur*). The remaining 18 percent had entered the dual system either without secondary credentials or after participating in a variety of federally sponsored job preparation programs. Previously discussed as displacement competition (Chapter 2), this shift toward a preference for *Realschule* graduates is even more prominent in apprenticeships for more prestigious occupations, like automotive mechanics or all the upper-level service occupations (Bundesministerium für Bildung und Forschung 2000, 134). Not surprisingly, most affected by these trends are young people from lower-class families and young non-Germans.

Sven, a *Hauptschule* graduate who is now apprenticing as a hairdresser, sums up his view of the disadvantaged position of *Hauptschule* students (Bremen Apprentices Focus Group, May 7, 2002):

> Sven: It's really tough in our school system here. I mean, if you only have a *Hauptschule* diploma, the *Realschule* students already think of you as an asshole. And they are already shit in the eyes of the *Gymnasium* students. Really, as a *Hauptschule* student, you carry a heavy load around. … And why should those sitting at the top … I mean, here he has to choose from ten people with *Hauptschule* and five with *Realschule*, and he has to hire four. Of course he'll take the four from the *Realschule*. He doesn't give a shit. People aren't interested in what you've done, they are only interested in your diploma, and that's the thing.

Clearly, the often touted advantage of Germany's transparent education system needs to be considered in light of these reproductive processes and inflexibilities. No doubt, the streaming at the secondary level and the resulting preferences in the labour market send very clear signals to students from all three school types about the boundaries within which they can realistically form dispositions about career plans. I defined these boundaries earlier as *Handlungsspielraum* (i.e., room for agency). However, it is obvious that for some there is hardly enough room to turn around.

Labour Market Opportunities

Besides RAP's purpose of facilitating school-work transitions for non-academically minded high school students, another purpose of the program is to increase young people's interest in careers in the trades. Particularly in Alberta, a recent boom in construction coupled with an aging workforce in the trades has caused serious concerns about a shortage of skilled workers. One of the selling features of programs like RAP is their promise of employment upon completion. It appears that those students most satisfied with the progress of their apprenticeship, and those whose decision to enter RAP seemed to be based on an understanding of what it means to be an apprentice, are also most aware of the employment prospects their choice offers. Keith, an Edmonton electrician apprentice seems to understand how the current labour market in Alberta works in his favour (Edmonton RAP Individual Interview, November 27, 2001):

> WL: How difficult do you think it will be to find work as an electrician once you're done as a journeyman?
> Keith: Not hard at all. There's too many … like in any newspaper, look under the trades, electrician, millwright, they're always there. Always. And it's a big list. They're looking for ya' [laughs].

Like Keith, the following three RAP students are aware of the labour shortages in the skilled trades and are confident that tradespeople will always be in demand (Edmonton RAP Focus Group, February 11, 2002):

> WL: Are you concerned at all about finding work once you have your ticket?
> Ted: Well, right now, welding is in high demand. Like, they got that statistics thing and they said welding here in Alberta will be in high demand probably for the next up to 100 years. Syncrude is good for another … they just hit some big hole or something, I don't know, and they're good for another 100 years. There is going to be a demand for welders.
> Dean: Welders don't live past 50. … In carpentry, people are always going to get houses or buildings or something, right. I can't really see a machine taking over my job.

Brent apprentices as a cook and already has two years of work experience. He was one of the most articulate, informed, and determined apprentices with whom I spoke. Here is what he has to say about employment prospects as a chef, but also about his future career plans (Edmonton RAP Individual Interview, November 22, 2001):

> Brent: If you're a cook, you can find a job no matter how bad you are [laughs]. It's really high in demand. We're looking for cooks and dishwashers non-stop. Everybody wants cooks because it's one of these trades that people get into and they're going to get hired because there's a lot of things going on. ... And I want to go around the States and get my schooling either in Europe or Paris or the States. And after that, I might even come back and get my international Gold Seal. And that's like the highest you can get in Canada, and that takes forever. … I'm not about to just sit in a no-name restaurant for 30 years and just sit and cook burgers, you know. I wanna be out doing hotels, world class cuisine. Learning how to actually do, create the things they do.

Sven is one of the Bremen apprentices, training to be a hairdresser. Much like Brent in Edmonton, his extreme confidence about his future is coupled with very ambitious career plans (Bremen Apprentices Focus Group, May 7, 2002):

> Sven: Look, when we know how to do something, that's something we got in our hands. Nobody can take that from us. And hair grows everywhere in the world. You could go off to Spain and cut hair on the beach for a couple of dollars. ... Hair always grows.
>
> ...
>
> Where do you see yourself in 10 years?
>
> ...
>
> Sven: I want to work for a while [in a salon] and then apply with a big company, because I'm young, I have ideas, and I know how the trend is going. Maybe I could develop products for this trend. … Can I dream a little, too? Then I'll be standing there and people are looking at me and say: "Here's a trendsetter." I do want people to know who I am.

Some RAP students confidently compare their own employment opportunities to those of university graduates, despite an overwhelming public discourse that predicts ever higher levels of post-secondary education necessary for employment success in a post-industrial economy. Recall Riley and Nathan who earlier talked about the financial advantages of earning money while learning as an apprentice, compared to spending money as a university or college student. Here are their comments on employment prospects with a trades ticket, relative to a higher post-secondary credential (Edmonton RAP Focus Group, October 22, 2002):

> WL: You know there is so much talk about needing more and more education these days. Do you think you will be held back without university in your career or life?
>
> Riley: Not really, because if you get a ticket, there is like … once you're a journeyman, if you're like … you can get a job anywhere. There is always … like trades are in most demand right now. All the old people are retired and they have no one to fill them. Like up at Syncrude right now, they need 60 electricians, and they found only 20 to fill the jobs. So they're still looking for 40.
>
> WL: So, you're pretty confident that there will be lots of work?
>
> Riley: There's like … my company is trying to hire people, and there's just not enough people to meet the demand.
>
> Nathan: I think the emphasis in the last … well, five years at least, on most kids has been to go to university and to go to college and get a degree in something, whereas they haven't been focusing a lot on the trades. And I think that's opened up a really big spot for anybody who wants to. I mean, it wasn't hard to find a job.

Not all RAP students, however, equate good employment opportunities with a fulfilling career. Tyler was enrolled as a RAP student, apprenticing as a heavy equipment technician at the time of the interview, although he was toying with the idea of not completing his apprenticeship and possibly preparing for college or university instead. Consequently, his outlook was less optimistic than that of other RAP students (Edmonton RAP Individual Interview, November 29, 2001):

> WL: Do you get a sense that if you decide to stay in the field that there would be a lot of work?
>
> Tyler: Yeah I think that there'd be a lot of work, for sure. But who knows if it'll be a lot of good work or just crap.

The overall sense of optimism about employment opportunities in the trades expressed by Edmonton RAP students is not uniformly mirrored by their colleagues in Bremen. Only the service occupation apprentices, like the chefs and hairdressers, are really confident that their line of work will always be in demand. For the apprentices in construction trades, the future doesn't seem quite as rosy (Bremen Apprentices Focus Group, May 14, 2002):

> WL: How easy or how difficult do you think it will be finding employment as a journeyman once you're done with your apprenticeship?
> Kai: Here in Bremen, as an electrician, the chances aren't all that good.
> Matthias: No, companies just don't get enough work.
> Kai: In our company, they just had to let five journeymen go. Earlier, they thought that they would need a lot of people, so they took on a lot of apprentices. Usually, our firm prefers to keep those they had as apprentices. But now, they only get temporary contracts, and after that, many have to leave. Not a lot is going on.
> WL: Are you worried about that?
> Steffen: Yeah, a bit. If you think about it sometimes, the recession in construction …

Given Germany's current high levels of adult unemployment, these young people have every reason to be concerned about employment past their apprenticeships. This is noteworthy, since North American policy-makers often see German-style apprenticeships as a solution to school-work transition problems. However, the real problem often lies in the lack of labour market opportunities. Companies like the one Kai talks about continue to train relatively high numbers of apprentices, despite a recession in the trades. While this might be a good practice, both in being prepared for an upswing in construction activity and for giving young people a chance to receive training even in bad economic times, there is also an element of exploiting these young people as cheap labour during their apprenticeship tenure.

Gendered School-Work Transitions and Welfare Regimes

Although Davies (1999) argues that gender and ethnic inequalities in Canada have declined, with respect to occupational aspirations and educational attainment, I found that gender continues to assert an extremely powerful influence on the way young people expected their educational and occupational careers to unfold. Heinz et al. (1987) criticize school-work transition and career decision-making research that tends to take youth as the basis for analysis or theorizing, without considering how gender may be implicated in this process (ibid., 266). Their German longitudinal research, following Grade 7 *Hauptschule* students through the remainder of their *Hauptschule* education and into the labour market, found a correspondence between traditional gender roles in society, a gender-segmented labour market, and gender-stratified transition processes into employment. Although their interviews with both young men and women about to enter employment and apprenticeships in the dual system revealed a strong perception of gender neutrality (e.g., neither boys nor girls believed in traditional ideas about the types of work a man or a woman should or should not do), their eventual transitions largely followed traditional gender roles. Heinz et al. concluded that this essential ascription into a gendered labour market and apprenticeship system is, in hindsight, re-interpreted by individuals as the result of long-standing dispositions, demonstrating how gender expectations have been internalized and both conform to and reproduce a gender-stratified labour market (ibid., 271-272).

With very few exceptions (e.g., one male hairdressing apprentice, two academic-track women planning to study engineering), the career plans of participants in this study did indeed conform to gender expectations. For instance, I was unable to find any young women apprenticing in traditional male trades to include in either the Edmonton or the Bremen youth apprentices sub-samples. This reflects recent national apprenticeship statistics. In 1997 in Canada, only 2.5 percent of building construction trades, 1.5 percent of industrial and mechanical trades and 2 percent of motor vehicle and heavy equipment apprentices were female (Statistics Canada 1999). In Germany, these figures are similar: only 2 percent of motor vehicle, 1 percent of metal trades and on average 1 percent of building construction apprentices are female (Bundesministerium für Bildung und Forschung 2001). Furthermore, female participants' expectations regarding parenting and motherhood played an important role in the formation of their dispositions toward post-high school plans.

Many of the young women with whom I spoke in interviews and focus groups (in the academic and apprenticeship sub-samples) brought up the issue of how having children and raising a family was an integral part of their decision-making process. This concern never appeared in conversations with young men. Joelle, who apprentices as a hairdresser in RAP, explains how her decision to become a hairdresser was influenced by traditional beliefs about gender roles (Edmonton RAP Focus Group, October 9, 2002):

> Joelle: I wasn't sure what I wanted, going into like high school. So I'm like ... I kind of took it [hairdressing in RAP] because, well, it's always a career, it's always something to fall back on if you want to stay home with your kids, something like that. You can always work part-time doing it. Or something like that. So there's always options there. Or you can work from home or things like that. It wasn't really a career move coming into high school, like that's what I was going to do for the rest of my life.

Career clearly took precedence over raising a family for the young Edmonton women in academic-track programs, although they nevertheless raised concerns about combining work and family (Edmonton Academic Focus Group, February 13, 2002):

WL: Can any of you, at this point, see any reason why you might not achieve what you want to do?

Jillian: Hmm, get pregnant. [laughs] … Uh, my mom, she got pregnant when she first got married, when my dad was still in university. And she wanted to go into education and it was an unplanned pregnancy, like … she was married, but it was an unplanned pregnancy. And so that kind of changed the course of her life. She didn't get to do what she wanted to do. She never ended up going to university. And so that's very important. And she stresses that kind of a point to me a lot, that the choices I make now could influence the rest of my life, and I got to be very careful in doing whatever it is I'm doing. And, you know, it might be fine being a kid, going out partying and stuff, but you gotta keep your head on straight, because you don't want to mess up now.

This key difference between the young Edmonton women in RAP and academic programs may reflect the fact that the youth apprentices have started to work and thus have already made, to some degree, a crucial transition into adulthood. This early integration into the workforce and adult roles may reinforce traditional gender expectations and roles, in part because the social networks of these young women have started to shift away from friends at school to older colleagues at work. As these colleagues are more likely to be in a "family" stage in their life course, the apprentices themselves may start to anticipate these events in their own lives.

The academic-track women in Germany were much more inclined than their Canadian counterparts to sacrifice education and career options for motherhood. Here are examples from two different focus groups.

(Bremen Academic Focus Group, May 24, 2002):

Simone: As a woman, I think if you want to have children later on, obviously you'll be out of work for a while because you're the one who's pregnant, even if the husband takes paternity leave. So, you'll still have to find your way back into work. … that is something that can hold you back, because I definitely want to have children, but I also want to accomplish things in my life. And I don't know if I'll be able to get it all together. … I don't really want to have children when I'm 35 or 40 … that's too late.

> (Bremen Academic Focus Group, May 29, 2002):
> Dorothea: I decided against going to university, because it would simply take too long, and I might have to miss out on having a family. And I definitely feel that if I have children, I want to be there for them. And then I would give up my job, at least for some time. …

These differences between young German and Canadian women regarding the formation of gender and career identities highlight the role of institutional features, particularly in the realm of welfare arrangements. Esping-Andersen's (1990) welfare regime typology is useful for discussing these differences. He argues that there are three highly diverse welfare regime types (liberal, conservative, and social-democratic), each organized around its own discrete logic of organization, stratification, and social integration. Canada is considered a *liberal* welfare state, in which the market is considered the best provider of individual welfare. Germany is seen as a c*onservative* welfare state in which benefits depend largely on employment-based contributions. The emphasis is on conservative family values and a traditional male breadwinner model, with a substantial set of policies and regulations that encourage mothers to stay at home (e.g., relatively extensive and generous maternity leaves and benefits). The differences in these welfare regimes obviously support public perceptions and discourses that, in turn, affect how young women themselves perceive their role in the family and the economy. Both the persistence of a male breadwinner model and the relatively generous benefits accorded women who choose to leave the labour market to care for their children are institutional features that have profound impacts on the formation of young German women's dispositions toward balancing family and career. The comments by Heidi, a Bremen *Gymnasium* student, appear to be typical of the beliefs of many German women (Bremen Academic Focus Group, May 29, 2002):

Heidi: That's just the way it is here: men work, women have children. And I can live with that, I think … uh, if the man makes good money.

In contrast, the male participants in my study, in both countries, seemed to be either blissfully ignorant of these issues (concerns about balancing fatherhood and career were not once raised by the male participants), or did not see the need to treat them as anything serious and affecting their own careers. The following excerpt from a focus group of apprentice car mechanics in Bremen demonstrates male attitudes (Bremen Apprentices Focus Group, May 14, 2002):

WL: I already asked you about your career goals for the future. How about personal goals, like starting a family?
[people talk over each other]
Matthias: Best not at all [laughs] … uh, I don't know.
Klaus: Let's say if you have a wife and she has a good job and makes good money, and you make good money, too, that's great, isn't it?
Detlef: [laughs] Yeah, but that puts you into a different tax bracket and in the end, you'll actually get less.
Klaus: … with children!
Detlef: If you are a single mother, you'll have nothing. I can guarantee you that.
Thomas: But you're not going to be a single mother now, won't you? [everybody laughs]

In short, almost all the female participants in my study raised the issue of combining work with family. Even for those who were adamant that being married and having children was not part of what they saw in their future, the issue still lurked in their minds. This was not the case for the male participants, whose career plans were untouched by any concerns about marriage or parenthood. These findings are, of course, not new. Evans (2002) found that although young German women generally saw themselves as having the same employment chances as men, they still expressed the view that at some point they would have to choose between work and family, and that childrearing possibilities were generally given preference. Analyzing the relationship between work and family life for older generations in Germany, Krüger (2001, 416) found that, despite changing attitudes about the role of women in the home and at work, about 70 percent of her sample continued to engage in work (or preparation for work) corresponding to gender stereotypes.

Overall, the situation is similar in Canada, despite the differences between the young women in Edmonton and Bremen in my study. While overall labour force participation and educational attainment of women has increased over time, employment of women is still concentrated in female job ghettos, with lower average earnings, fewer benefits and limited career potential (see Krahn and Lowe 2002 for an overview of women's employment in Canada). As far as the relationship between parenting and work is concerned, Looker (1993), in a 1989 study of 17 year-old youth in three different Canadian locales (Hamilton, ON; Halifax, NS; and rural NS), found that when neither marriage nor children were being considered, women's preferences to work full-time were similar to those of men. However, when asked to consider their employment plans once they have children, she found a significant decrease in the number of women who planned to work, and the majority of those who still considered employment did so on a part-time basis. These expectations of young women are of course confirmed by aggregate statistical evidence, which shows how having children reduces women's labour force participation (see e.g. Statistics Canada 2000b).

Summary

This chapter addressed the second part of research question 3, namely the extent to which young people themselves perceive their transitions from high school as shaped by structural elements. Of particular interest in Chapter 6 was the way in which the institutional context frames transitions processes and the formation of dispositions toward employment and post-secondary education. The cross-national comparison between Canada (Alberta) and Germany provided the basis for this discussion. The German dual system is often acknowledged as a model for North American youth apprenticeships, despite criticism that it is heavily implicated in the reproduction of social inequality (see Chapter 2). Comparing Germany's traditional apprenticeship program, firmly embedded in its social and economic structure, with Alberta's recently-introduced RAP made it possible to study processes of social reproduction, but also how young people actively negotiate their post-secondary education transitions, given very different social contexts and boundaries.

The two key differences are: 1) Germany's heavily streamed, tripartite secondary education system versus Canada's comprehensive secondary schools; and 2) Germany's occupationally-stratified labour market versus Canada's internal/external labour market segmentation (discussed below). Germany's labour market builds on an extensive range of federally regulated occupations, all of which have a clearly defined job content and prerequisite profile (e.g., the type of training or credential necessary to perform the job). Such a transparent arrangement sends unmistakable signals to youth as to the type of education and training needed to enter an occupation. The dual system is intimately tied into this framework, as it provides the officially regulated training program that will lead to certification in many of these occupations. In contrast, the labour market in Canada is characterized by segmentation into internal and external labour markets, with often very opaque and firm-specific job requirements. For most careers (with the exception of the professions), a specific type of credential is not necessary. What is required is an opportunity to break into an internal labour market and to climb its career ladder. Consequently, educational credentials and occupations are not clearly linked, although a relationship between higher levels of educational attainment and social mobility still exists and is generally understood.

Comparing the qualitative findings from this chapter with the survey data analyzed in Chapter 5 lends support to Giddens' notion of structures (including institutional features) as both enabling and constraining (Giddens 1984). In both chapters, we see evidence of the socially reproductive outcomes of streaming in Germany's secondary education system. Participants in the dual system are more likely to come from a lower socio-economic background, whether measured by family income or parents' educational and occupational attainment (Chapter 5). My qualitative findings confirmed that, within the youth apprentice sub-sample, graduates from the *Hauptschule* stream (i.e., the lowest of the three secondary school streams) had the greatest difficulties in finding apprenticeship positions. The different quantitative findings for the Edmonton and Bremen sub-samples discussed in Chapter 5 already suggested that the transparent yet inflexible German educational system and labour market structures are more prone to the social reproduction of inequality. The qualitative findings regarding the socially reproductive nature of Germany's heavily streamed, tripartite secondary school system presented in this chapter added to this perception. Yet, despite these institutionally based disadvantages, the German youth apprentices' understanding of how the dual system functions, and of the options open to them within the system, in other words the system's transparency, also created conditions for informed decision making and, thus, agency (*Handlungsspielraum*).

In contrast, the flexibility of the Canadian labour market came at the cost of uncertain and confusing transitions. The latter applied not only to youth apprentices who had very little information about the institutional requirements of their apprenticeship, but also to academic-track high school students who expressed uncertainty about where their studies might take them. In terms of Giddens' structuration theory, the transparent sets of rules and relationships guiding the German system create a sense of ontological security that seemed missing for a substantial number of Edmonton youth apprentices who were relatively poorly informed about apprenticeship requirements and expectations beyond high school.

In this chapter, I have also shown how cultural and institutional features that seem, at first sight, to be unrelated to school-work transitions still exert very powerful influences on young people's dispositions. Germany's specific welfare arrangements, with their continued reliance on a male breadwinner model and generous maternity leave benefits, have created conditions in which young women seem to have accepted their primary role as stay-at-home mothers and the labour market discrimination that goes hand in hand. Unlike my more optimistic assessment of structures creating conditions for agency (*Handlungsspielraum*) in Germany's heavily regulated education system and labour market, women's role in Germany's welfare regime clearly limited *Handlungsspielraum*. Dispositions of the young German women in my study regarding school-work transitions were often based on how well they can be consolidated with the demands of having a family.

Yet, the same women who discussed issues of maternity as relevant to their career choices also suggested that gender is no longer a structural factor that can hold you back from achieving your goals. Similarly, despite the realization of a number of Bremen youth apprentices that their lower levels of secondary education have a negative impact on finding apprenticeship positions, both the Edmonton and Bremen youth apprentices really did not articulate the socially reproductive nature of their participation in youth apprenticeships. As I have shown in Chapter 5, youth apprentices overwhelmingly list their interest in manual work as the only reason for participating in youth apprenticeships. It might therefore be tempting to revert to a more determinist interpretation that sees structural forces working behind individuals' backs and essentially negating the agency they themselves expressed in their reasons for becoming youth apprentices. However, the following chapters demonstrate that this would be too narrow a view, as even reproductive processes are infused with various forms of agency.

But before moving into this more interpretive analysis, I need to revisit research question 3. While Chapter 5 analyzed individuals' own accounts of dispositions and agency, and this chapter looked at the impact of institutional contexts on the formation of these dispositions, Chapter 7 will address the extent to which youth apprentices and academic-track students credit "others" (e.g., parents, siblings, peers, and teachers) with having influenced their post-high school plans and transitions.

Chapter 7

Social Context: "I'm Doing It and I Hope You'll Support Me in It"

So far, I have described young people's accounts of their own dispositions to engage in specific transitions from high school (Chapter 5), and their own understanding of the institutional context in which these transitions take place (Chapter 6). The majority of my study participants exuded confidence in their decisions, and believed that their own interests and dispositions were the most important elements in their decision making. In this chapter, I will take a closer look at the social environment in which individual decision making occurs, and will question to what degree young people credit others, like parents, siblings, peers, teachers, and other role models, with having influenced their choices and plans.

Parents

Given that all of the Edmonton and two thirds of the Bremen participants in my study still lived at home, I was interested in whether they felt that their parents had any influence on their decisions. Overwhelmingly, in both countries, study participants asserted their independence from parental influence. This was particularly true for youth apprentices, both in Edmonton and in Bremen. Here are two Edmonton RAP students, talking about the most important influences on their decision to enter RAP (Edmonton RAP Focus Group, October 22, 2002):

> WL: If you look back again at making up your mind, who do you think was most positive about you going [into RAP]? Who encouraged you most?
> Riley: Myself [laughs].

> Nathan: Yeah, I'd have to say myself as well. At that point, when I made the decision, in my mind, it was my own decision. I talked to my teacher and told my teacher that's what I want to do. I was already 18, so my attitude towards my parents was "I hope you agree with me, because I'm doing it. And if you don't, this is what I'm doing with my life." You know, it's just one of those things, I'm doing it and I hope you'll support me in it.

Youth apprentices do nevertheless engage in discussions with their parents and are aware of their parents' hopes for them. Brent, who apprentices as a cook, put it succinctly when he told me that "of course every parent wants their kid to go to university." But, ultimately, his parents still wanted him to be happy and to pick what he wanted to do (Edmonton RAP Individual Interview, November 23, 2001).

Similarly, German youth apprentices strive to express their independence from their parents, while acknowledging that it is quite appropriate for their parents to make suggestions and to give tips. A focus group of car mechanic apprentices talked about their parents and whether they were aware of different plans their parents may have had for them (Bremen Apprentices Focus Group, May 14, 2002):

> WL: As we are already talking about your parents, did they ever have any different plans for you?
> [everybody: no]
> WL: Did they ever want you to continue with schooling?
> Matthias: Well, I was supposed to continue with *Handelsschule* [a form of secondary school that can lead to topic-specific, limited *Abitur*; usually taken by *Realschule* graduates]. Do some more schooling so that I can get a higher diploma.
> Detlef: For me apprenticeship, didn't matter in what area.
> Thomas: Join the military, become an officer.
> Steffen: They left it up to me. They only said "do whatever you think is right for you."
> WL: Nobody felt any pressure from their parents?
> Klaus: Not really, but …
> Matthias: … they did make some suggestions and drop some hints.

Like Matthias, Kai, an electrician apprentice in Bremen, agrees that parents may have hinted at alternative choices. He goes on to explain why he thinks this is quite appropriate, as long as the final decision remains his (Bremen Apprentices Focus Group, May 14, 2002):

> Kai: Well, they [parents] did offer some advice, somehow, because after all they do know what we're good at and where our interest lie. They did give their opinion, but left the decision definitely to me.

These findings are in line with other empirical research on the relationship between parents and youth in the transition from high school. Although parents' plans, wishes, and aspirations for their children are generally seen as embedded in the parents' own biography (Birkelbach 2001), the influence they have on their children's decision is more one of advice than of outright pressure.

In a Dutch study analyzing parental influence on youth's transition into various forms of labour market participation (e.g., apprenticeship training or employment), du Bois-Reymond et al. (1992) found that, despite generally supportive and open-minded relationships between parents and their children with regards to career plans and aspirations,[35] parents do not fulfill an important function as informed career counsellors. Parents' influence is restricted to more general concerns, like occupational and financial stability, self-actualization, and social status, but they have little up-to-date or concrete knowledge about specific occupations, training programs, or university studies. To a large degree, this finding is confirmed by my study. Even if parents may not be familiar with newly emerging occupations, changing labour market requirements, or new university and apprenticeship programs, or if their children do not perceive them as reliable informants in this respect, parents still do fulfill a crucial function in pushing their children in certain post-secondary directions.

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[35] The authors argue that at this stage in their children's adolescence, most parents have shifted from a more authoritative parenting style (*Befehlseltern*) to one characterized by reasoning and negotiation (*Verhandlungseltern*); although they did find class-specific differences in this respect.

Only in a very few cases did RAP students credit their parents with pushing them to learn more about RAP and eventually enrolling in it. Bonnie, a hairdressing apprentice, is one such exception (Edmonton RAP Focus Group, October 09, 2002):

> WL: How did your parents feel about RAP and you wanting to become hairdressers?
> Bonnie: It was my mom that made me do everything … my mom [laughs]. She was the main person who like told me to go into hairdressing. She's like [puts on voice] "well isn't there some program you should enter?" And she would ask me all these weird questions. And I said, OK mom, I'll find out; and that's kind of how it happened.
> WL: What did your mom like about you going into hairdressing?
> Bonnie: I could do her hair [laughs, so do the others], that's very much it. She, … she basically told me it's something I can fall back on, whatever I do, if it doesn't work out. And I'm like, my god, she's right…

A few parents (usually fathers) did become important influences on the decision-making process when they were considered authorities in the occupation, rather than "simply" parents. Brad, who entered RAP as a pipe fitter apprentice, explains (Edmonton RAP Individual Interview, November 28, 2001):

> Brad: Hmm, my dad's a pipe fitter. So, I kind of wanted to see what he does for work. It sounds pretty interesting to me. … Going up in cranes, like doing crane control. And stuff that he does, like the pipes that he works, it's like he says, you can walk through the pipes once they've been put together. I thought that was pretty cool, like the way they move them and stuff.
> …
> WL: Was he pretty pleased when you came and told him that you might want to [apprentice as a pipe fitter]?
> Brad: Yeah. He was … well, at first he was like "you don't have to do that just because I'm doing it." I said, "no, it sounds pretty fun, I wouldn't mind trying it", he says "OK".
> …

> WL: Had you ever thought about something else in RAP, other than pipe fitting?
> Brad: I thought about doing carpentry, because that's what I used to do with my grandpa. But then, I've kind of figured pipe fitting, 'cause it's pretty good money. But, since my dad kind of did it, I should do it, too. In the family.

Despite the accounts of independent choice with minimal, but positive parental support, two of the German youth apprentices told stories characterized by the quintessential struggle between a parent's expectations and a young person's rebellion. Sven is a second year hairdressing apprentice who, throughout the interview, cast himself as a reformed rebel and troublemaker. He had been kicked out of various schools, dropped out of several other apprenticeships, and quit a number of casual jobs before settling into his current apprenticeship as a hairdresser. Not surprisingly, his rebellious past is also reflected in the way he talks about his parents' initial wishes for him (Bremen Apprentices Focus Group, May 7, 2002):

> WL: Did your parents have different plans for you?
> Sven: I was supposed to study business. I was supposed to end up like my dad … well my dad … such a narrow-minded, conservative fart (*Spießer*) … I didn't want that.
> WL: Did your father study?
> Sven: Yes, he has two degrees.

While Sven rejects his parents' expectations as bourgeois and does not give them any second thought (although, later in the interview, he does speak passionately about continuing to learn to be the best in his field and maybe going to university later in life), Julia finds it more difficult to come to terms with her parents' disappointment in her choice to become a hairdresser. Julia attended *Gymnasium* but, tired of going to school, left before she finished her *Abitur* and started an apprenticeship as a hairdresser, much to her parents' dismay (Bremen Apprentices Focus Group, May 7, 2002):

> WL: How did your parents react when you talked to them about your career plans [to apprentice as a hairdresser].
> Julia: Well, … they did support me, but they were really against it, because my parents do know how I did at school. They thought … this may sound conceited, but … right away they said to me, you can do better. … But they do support me. When things at the apprenticeship didn't work out so well in the first weeks and I changed employers, and I was totally frustrated and cried a lot, they totally supported me. But more or less, they did tell me, … rather not.
> WL: Did they have different plans for you?
> Julia: Yes, *Abitur*.
> WL: And university?
> Julia: [nods]
> WL: And do they still want that?
> Julia: I think they would like me to … yeah, my dad would like to see that.
> WL: Can you still imagine that for yourself, in the future?
> Julia: I'm not sure [laughs].
> WL: May I ask if your parents themselves have *Abitur* or studied at university?
> Julia: Yeah, my dad dropped out, and I think that's his point, that's why he would have liked to see me go to university. But he also understood, he himself had just had it with school. He himself lived his life like that. In a way, I want to start my life like he did, and that's why we often clash.

Despite the wishes of her parents, Julia' decision to leave secondary school without the *Abitur* and to embark on a manual career reflects dispositions that she formed in relation to her social environment. Neither of her parents completed any form of post-secondary education. Thus, her decision not to go to university and to become a hairdresser is what we would expect given her habitus.

Equally interesting are the relationships in which one parent, usually the father, does have work experience in a specific trade, but cautions his child against it. Tim apprentices as a millwright in RAP. Most male members in his family, including his father and a brother, work in construction, an area in which he also has some casual work experience. And while his father encouraged Tim to explore the trades, he also advised him against a career in construction (Edmonton RAP Individual Interview, November 22, 2001):

> WL: Now it seems that your brother and your dad are both in construction. Did they ever tell you to go into construction as well? Because you're still in the trade, but in a different field?
>
> Tim: Well, my dad was kind of worried that I would go into the same field as him.
>
> WL: Oh.
>
> Tim: That's why he didn't want me to go into the same field as him, because he knows what it's like and he doesn't want me beating up my body like he has.
>
> WL: So, one of his intentions was for you to have it a little easier than he did?
>
> Tim: Yeah.
>
> WL: So, he would have pushed you away from construction?
>
> Tim: He would have left the choice up to me, if I had wanted to do what he does or if I had wanted to do something else. But he would have supported me, even if I was to go work with him. He wouldn't look at me different because it's something I wanted to do but he didn't want me to do.
>
> WL: And millwright as a choice, was he pretty happy with that?
>
> Tim: He actually is the one who pointed it out to me.

Tim's father thus asserts an influence over Tim's decision in two ways. First, he acts as an authority on careers in the trades generally, indicating that this is indeed a good choice. Second, his own work experience grants insights into the working conditions of a specific trade and he consequently advises Tim to consider potential alternatives. The following quote illustrates how this advice continues to be of value to Tim (Edmonton RAP Individual Interview, November 22, 2001):

> Tim: Yeah, … my dad has been really helpful. 'Cause there's been days where I've had a really bad day and I talk to my dad about it. And he like tries to talk to me about what to do and like not to take things so seriously at work and stuff. But I've actually brought my dad into the workplace and showed him around and introduced him to my boss and stuff. So, he has an idea what it's like but … he tries and helps the best he can, I guess.

Unlike Tim's father, who supports and encourages Tim's wish to enter a trade, some parents with trades experience are very instrumental in pushing their (usually) sons away from a career in that field. Trent, whose father has worked all his life in construction, is a perfect example (Edmonton Academic Focus Group, February 13, 2002):

> WL: Trent, I want to ask you because your dad is in construction. Had you ever thought about RAP?
>
> Trent: No, because I've been told my whole life, … my dad would come home from work and I'd see what he looks like and … he's kind of depressed a little bit, you know, and you can see that but he won't say it. You know, my whole life he's told me not to get into this, so I don't even bother.

In contrast to most of the youth apprentices, high school students in the academic mainstream are much more inclined to view their parents as role models, to plan following in their footsteps and to credit their parents with direct influences on their decisions to enter university. The German *Gymnasium* students seemed to particularly respect their parents' potential ability to provide insights into different occupations and careers, while still leaving the final decision to their children (Bremen Academic Focus Group, May 24, 2002):

> Theresa: OK, what I'll end up doing is my decision, but I will definitely seek advice from my parents, and from good friends. That way I'll have different points of view and will be able to decide what to do. I don't think I'll make the decision all on my own.

Perhaps German parents can give better advice to their children compared to Canadian parents, because of the more regulated German labour market and the greater transparency between education system and labour market (see Chapter 7).

Like the RAP students whose parents were in a trade, academic-track students' acceptance of parents' advice also depends on the fit between their parents' career and their own aspirations. Consider, for instance, Lisa, an Edmonton high school student whose plan it is to become a teacher, just like both her parents. Her view of her mother as a role model, and ideally even a future colleague, is in stark contrast to the claims of decision making expressed by many youth apprentices (Edmonton Academic Focus Group, December 6, 2001):

> Lisa: English, yes. I want to major in English, yeah. But also, my mom and dad both teach disabled kids, like mentally handicapped. And my mom … by the time she retires, I'll be pretty much into that field. I'd love to take over her class, maybe team-teach with her for a couple of years, to make sure I really get it. We were talking about that, my mom and I, and we thought that would be so neat. I kind of thought of that; I'll be 25 and she'll be retiring. So she can hand the job over to me, but we can teach together at first.

Similarly, Anthony, who is planning to enter university in chemical engineering, talks about his respect for his father, who is also a chemical engineer, and how this respect has influenced his decision to follow in his father's footsteps (Edmonton Academic Focus Group, December 13, 2002):

> Anthony: Well, I just saw my dad doing it and he's really proud of what he does and like, he gets to travel all over the world. And it just … he just pretty much made the … he didn't make the decision for me, but he knew that somewhere along the way I was going to ask him a question like what does it take to become a chemical engineer. And, like, he told me all about it and I'm like, yeah, this is what I want to do.

Lisa and Anthony admire their parents' success in their occupations and acknowledge them as very direct influences on their own decisions. Other academic high school students, like Alissa in Edmonton, perceive a more subtle, indirect influence (Edmonton Academic Focus Group, February 13, 2002):

> Alissa: My parents, you know, they plant the seed, they kind of get you thinking, you're definitely going to university. And that's something that I would have chosen on my own, had I had the choice, but I think that, you know, they also guided me along some paths. They kind of opened up and they showed me that you know, you can go and do it and these are the kind of jobs you can get. They kind of influenced me that way, but it's mostly been my own kind of decision.

Alissa's account suggests a powerful yet unspoken assumption that there never really has been any alternative to university for her. Alternatives have not been offered in the home, and consequently she has not considered them herself. Considering her family's above-average financial situation, and her father's educational and occupational attainment (although not finishing, he attended university for some years and now works as a manager for the provincial government), this case (and others like it) lends support to Bourdieu's notions of habitus and cultural capital.

Parents' influence on dispositions became even more prominent when academic-track participants were asked to consider alternatives to higher post-secondary education (Edmonton Academic Focus Group, December 6, 2001):

> WL: Hypothetically, if you came home from school this afternoon, and you said "Mom, dad, I want to quit school and I want to become an electrician, or a welder". What would happen?
> Lisa: They would probably be disappointed. They would be like "if that's really what you want to do," but then I would feel so guilty.
> [everybody laughs]
> Charlene: Yeah, it's kind of that [puts on timid, unconvinced parent's voice] "oh, well, that's up to you". You know they want you to be more, but they're not going to tell you "no, you can't do that."
> Max: It wouldn't be like "congratulations," it'd be more like "well, if you really want to ...," you know, but not really tell you ...
> Charlene: ... and then they'd probably throw in a few disadvantages, why you wouldn't want to be that ...

Lisa: I feel they would just lay the guilt trip … "OK, you know you can't turn back now …."
Max: Yes, they're giving you the guilt trip, but they're trying to hide it.
Charlene: [in parent's voice] "You could make more money, but if that's what you really want to do."

These narratives demonstrate a strong influence of parents on the students. However, they are also representative of a parent-youth relationship in which young people, while aware of their parents' hopes and dislikes, still insist on independence in the final decision and their parents' acceptance of this independence.

Thus, despite young people's insistence that ultimately career decisions are made independent from their parents, family does play an extremely important role in the formation of disposition. Although this influence generally remains opaque to the young people themselves, the very independence on which they insist is to be understood as both bound and habitual. I will return to these issues in more detail in Chapter 8.

Peers

Peers emerged as another important group for word-of-mouth promotion of RAP, particularly those who had entered the program earlier and could provide reliable inside information. Such individuals seemed to have a greater influence than even parents or teachers (Edmonton RAP Individual Interview, November 28, 2001):

Ron: Yeah. [My friend] had signed up before summer, so he got his hours in there too. He just told me about it come school time, so I could sign up and everything. So I signed up.

Some friends, particularly older friends working in the trades or in manual work, serve as credible sources for word-of-mouth information regarding RAP and its advantages. Other peers can be important for the opposite reason, because they are less motivated, less focused and, in a sense, adrift. Such individuals reassure RAP students that they have made the right decision, and that they are already on the path to successful adulthood. Debbie, apprenticing as a hairdresser, considered herself to be the only one of her group of friends who had formed a concrete plan about her future and had started to implement this plan (Edmonton RAP Individual Interview, November 23, 2001):

> Debbie: I'm the only one going somewhere in my life right now, out of all my friends.

Curtis apprentices as an automotive mechanic. His narrative ultimately restores his own faith in his decision, while also proving wrong his friends' initial negative reaction to his choice (Edmonton RAP Individual Interview, November 28, 2001):

> WL: Are there any friends who said to you at the beginning "what are you doing?"
> Curtis: Yeah. There's a couple of them. [unintelligible, but mimics friends being negative]. ...You know, "just do your thing and I'll do mine and we'll see who turns out better."
> WL: So, it didn't bother you?
> Curtis: No.
> WL: What were some of the reasons that they thought it might not be a good idea?
> Curtis: Well, they said "what are you going to do at an automotive place." And then when they saw the work I was getting and the money they paid me and how happy I was with what I have, then they were really thinking. Then I was laughing at them.

The following excerpt from a focus group of Edmonton academic high school students also suggests that friends play an important, albeit often unacknowledged part in the formation of dispositions, if only, as is the case here, by making certain decisions appear more comfortable or safer (Edmonton Academic Focus Group, February 13, 2002):

> WL: Do you think your friends are an important influence on your decision making?
> Nadine: Absolutely, I think.
> WL: In what way?
> Nadine: I don't know, it's … it's almost like if you have the same interests as them, it's just another … it'll be a lot more comfortable transition, you know.
> Carol: Yeah, it's the support. Like, if Nadine is coming with me, I don't feel as scared now about going to university, because I know her and [other name] will be there, and … yeah. But other than me picking my, like what I'm taking and stuff, it didn't really have much of an affect on me. It's just basically support that I feel.
> Nadine: Yeah, it's a good thing to have them there, but it didn't really make any difference choosing whether or not to go to university.
> Alissa: Yeah, that's what I was just going to say. It'll be great to have somebody else who wants to go into the same thing, because, you know, you got classes together and everything. But it hasn't actually influenced what I'm going into, or anything like that.

This conversation is echoed by the following excerpt from a focus group of Bremen *Gymnasium* students about how they see their friends' choices becoming a model for their own. Silke's plans are to first complete an apprenticeship as a computer designer in the dual system and then to study, probably design, at university (Bremen Academic Focus Group, May 24, 2002):

> Silke: In my case, I think 80 percent of my friends study, and the rest either still goes to school or does apprenticeships. But it's mostly because of my friends that I still want to go to university myself. That's why I didn't quit school after Grade 10 (*Realschule*). It's because they all study. I don't know, I don't think you can call it peer pressure, but it's kind of like that; if they're all doing it, then you want to do it too.

It should also be noted that both Silke's parents are highly educated. Her father's occupation as a doctor suggests a level of both economic and cultural capital in Silke's upbringing that most likely influences her dispositions toward university in the future, as well as her choice of friends. Thus, the influence of peers is often directly related to an individual's position in the hierarchical social structure.

Teachers and Counsellors

Most RAP participants' comments suggest that teachers, particularly those in the academic core subjects, know little about their current involvement in RAP and had no direct impact on their decision to enter the program. Debbie apprentices as a hairdresser. Her comments are quite representative of what others told me throughout the interviews and focus group discussions (Edmonton RAP Individual Interview, November 23, 2001):

WL: How about other teachers; teachers in your normal classes. Did you ever talk to them about going into RAP?
Debbie: No.
WL: Did they ever show any interest?
Debbie: No.
WL: Do most of them not even know?
Debbie: Most of them don't even know at all.

Nevertheless, some teachers still fulfill important roles in directing students toward youth apprenticeships, either by sparking initial interest in a heretofore unknown program, or by providing additional encouragement. Curtis apprentices as an automotive technician. His story shows the role that vocational teachers play, one similar to that of core subject teachers for students in the academic mainstream. They recognize talent, create interest in career options, and provide support during the decision-making process (Edmonton RAP Individual Interview, November 28, 2001):

WL: So, you had been in that Industrial Ed class?
Curtis: Yeah.
WL: Did that help you make up your mind [to enter RAP as an automotive technician apprentice]?

Curtis: Oh yeah, it was fun. That was my highest mark, actually.
WL: Your teacher, did he suggest you go into that. Did he at all talk about it?
Curtis: Me and him, we talked a lot about the RAP program.
WL: What did he tell you about it?
Curtis: Well, he told me that .... [pause] ... it was a fun thing to do. It pays good, and he said, "just judging by your marks, that you ... it comes naturally." He said, "I would give it a shot if I were you."

Although few students would have immediately identified teachers as influences on their decision to enter a program like RAP, some further probing and more direct questions regarding the influence of teachers and counsellors revealed a strikingly different picture. The following conversation between Ted, Dean, and Nick, all three apprentices in RAP, shows the not-so-subtle influences teachers may have on the formation of dispositions toward a certain career path (Edmonton RAP Focus Group, February 11, 2002):

WL: What impact do you think your teachers have had on your decision?
...
Ted: ... I'm good with my hands. A lot of teachers recommended me to go into the RAP program, because I'm somebody who likes hands-on work. Like I'm not a mental worker, I'm more hands-on.
...
Nick: Well, I'd say a lot of them told me the same thing as Ted. Like everybody's told me for a long time that I'm hands-on, so that kind of wanted me to do it.

Of note in this conversation are turns of phrases and leaps of logic that are used to acknowledge the influence of teachers, without sacrificing the image of independent decision making. For instance, Nick talks about how teachers told him he was good with his hands, which, in turn, "kind of wanted me to do it." Debbie's comments about her interaction with vocational teachers prior to enrolling in RAP are even more revealing of the influence her vocational teacher had on her decision to apprentice as a hairdresser (Edmonton RAP Individual Interview, November 23, 2001):

> WL: At school, your [vocational] teachers, or the work experience co-ordinators … have they been very supportive and encouraging when you came to talk about maybe wanting to do that [enter RAP as a hairdressing apprentice]?
> Debbie: Oh yeah.
> WL: What kind of advice did they give you?
> Debbie: Well, they just really … *they just told me why I wanted to do this and why I was interested in it* [my emphasis], and I just told why I was interested in it.

While making alternatives transparent to less academically-minded ("hands-on") and often school-weary students, teachers and counsellors may also be performing an individual streaming function that, albeit more subtle, is not that different from the institutional streaming in Germany's secondary education system. As outlined in the description of the German dual system in Chapter 2, relatively early in their secondary education young people are streamed into one of three different school types, *Hauptschule*, *Realschule,* or *Gymnasium*. Once individuals have been placed within a certain school type, preferences and dispositions are shaped in very profound ways. Consider, for instance, the following two excerpts from a focus group with students in a Bremen *Gymnasium*, all of whom are planning to go to university. In the first excerpt, Theresa talks about whether she had ever thought about quitting high school. In the second excerpt, Sandra talks about a career exploration internship she did at a hair salon (Bremen Academic Focus Group, May 24, 2002):

> Theresa: …, because without *Abitur*, what are you going to do? Become a hairdresser? I didn't really want to do that, because … well, I think [laughs nervously], it's like that, being a hairdresser doesn't exactly require a whole lot of intelligence … I mean, if I wanted to be a hairdresser, I could have gone to the *Hauptschule* or the *Realschule*.

…

Sandra: Well, I did an internship in a hair salon. That's because I did my first internship in a data storage company. And that was very boring, because I sat a lot in front of a computer and hardly had any contacts with clients. That's why I thought, why not do something more practical. And the area interested me as well. But I don't think I could do it as a job later. But I did have a lot of fun, and that's why I wanted to see what it's all about.

WL: So it was fun then?

Sandra: Yeah, a lot of fun.

WL: But you couldn't see yourself doing it as a career?

Sandra: No, that won't do, because why would I need to do my *Abitur* for that.

Attending *Gymnasium* is an expression of habitus and cultural capital since this decision is, in most cases, made early enough to reflect almost exclusively the parents' choice. In turn, curriculum and culture enforce habitus and thus the formation of dispositions regarding post-secondary plans. And as is the case with Debbie, the Edmonton RAP student from whom we heard above, teachers assume a key role in this process. Here is a discussion between Julia, Anne, and Ellen, all of whom are apprenticing as hairdressers in Bremen. Both Julia and Ellen attended *Gymnasium* for at least one year, both without completing and gaining their *Abitur*, while Anne attended and graduated from the *Realschule*. Effectively, this means that all three have the same secondary diploma, but with remarkably different school experiences (Bremen Apprentices Focus Group, May 7, 2002):

WL: Did you receive a lot of support at school?

Julia: The teachers talked a lot of rubbish, you didn't even need to … Yeah, all of them tried to tell me "stay at school, stay at school, finish your *Abitur*, finish your *Abitur,*" constantly. Teachers just pushed me. And at one point, I just shut off and said to myself, just leave me alone.

Anne: In my school, teachers were really helpful. They did an awful lot with us, for our career decisions. They really … I mean they really gave it their all. And they also seriously said, because a lot of us wanted to continue school and try to do the *Abitur*, "you won't make it, why don't you rather start an apprenticeship," or something like that. That was really … yes, they really helped us in a big way.

> Ellen: For me that didn't really happen. I continued in school for another year, Grade 11, because I had no idea what I wanted to do. And they [teachers] always advised me against it [becoming a hairdresser], because, you know, this was Grade 11 and you're on your way to the *Abitur*. And they are finishing their *Abitur* now, my old school mates … and then becoming a hairdresser? Well, that was seen as a bad choice, and how could I do that? Nobody thought that was a good idea. The teachers, too. When we did our last internship … "how can you do that? If you're at the *Gymnasium*, you can't go and train to be a hairdresser."

Initial streaming processes that slot students into different school types create certain expectations about post-secondary choice, both with students and teachers. While Julia and Ellen's teachers at the *Gymnasium* were horrified at the thought that somebody would throw away the privilege and potential that the *Abitur* affords its graduates, Anne's teachers at the *Realschule* were actively "cooling out" students with ambitions to continue their secondary education (even though Anne interprets this intervention as a very helpful reality-check).

As the previous interview excerpts with Edmonton RAP students showed, teachers and students in Edmonton obviously engaged in similar relationships of encouragement and discouragement. However, while it might be tempting to charge schools and teachers with using programs like RAP to stream working-class or lower-performing students into a vocational program and out of more academic opportunities, such charges should be made cautiously. Conversations I had with teachers, work experience co-ordinators, counsellors and others involved with RAP make it quite obvious that these people are genuinely concerned about the well-being of the students entering the program. Many see a program like RAP as a perfect way to bring an interest in learning back to students otherwise disenchanted with high school. Similarly, a number of the RAP students with whom I spoke credit RAP with making school more meaningful, or even with giving them a reason to stay in school and finish their diploma (Edmonton RAP Individual Interview, November 22, 2001):

> WL: Did you find that some of the stuff you do at school now makes more sense, that you are more motivated?
>
> Luis: Yes. It's like, you know, .. 'cause I didn't believe much of what teachers say, and I find it all fake. But now I believe and I'm trying.

Other Role Models and Influences

As I mentioned earlier, parents, peers, and teachers are more likely to be recognized as influences on career decision making if they also provide some form of inside knowledge into the chosen career field. For youth apprentices, parents who have also been in the trades are respected as professionals, rather than as parents per se. Vocational, rather than academic teachers provide acceptable and reliable information about programs like RAP. And peers that have already experienced "real" work are accepted as providing authentic insights. Added to this list can be professionals who are already active in the career of interest, but who are not necessarily part of the students' social network.

While Debbie sees no influences from her parents (" they told me to do whatever I want, because it's my future, not theirs") or friends at school, role models outside the family, within the chosen profession, are readily accepted as influences on her decision to enter RAP (Edmonton RAP Individual Interview, November 23, 2001):

> Debbie: I work at a hair salon. I would go there to get my hair done and they would always ask me if I was interested in it. And I always was, ever since I was a little girl. I've always liked doing hair, all of that. After, they told me to come to Mr. X [high school's work experience co-ordinator] and talk to him about some of the programs they have at school. So I could start my program right now and I don't have to do it

right after I get off from high school, I don't have to do everything. So I have part of it done.

...

WL: And were [the people in the salon] very encouraging or supportive?

Debbie: Oh yes, because ... one of the people I work with told me to go into this program. They encouraged me to go into this program. And I listened to her and I did it. Yeah, ... [pause] ... it's really good.

Once youth apprentices have started to work, colleagues often provide a sense of belonging and reassurance (Edmonton RAP Individual Interview, November 27, 2001):

WL: Talking to people you work with, do they give you some security that this a good choice?

Scott: Yeah, they do. They're all pretty good guys. They make me feel like one of them.

I have already touched on the importance of comparisons with "unfocused", undecided peers. In a sense, these peers serve as "anti"-role models whose behaviour and attitudes signify stagnation and regression, compared to one's own progress. A similarly important comparison group, particularly for youth apprentices, is that of the "labour market failure." These anti-role models can be found in the family, the peer group, or in previous work experiences. For instance Dean, the same RAP student who earlier commented on how inconsequential his parents were on his decision to enter RAP, talks about how his older brother's failure to take advantage of RAP the previous year influenced his own decision to "hop on it" (Edmonton RAP Focus Group, February 11, 2002):

Dean: He wanted to [go into RAP] and he kicked himself in the ass because he didn't go.

More often, however, experiences from previous employment, such as summer or part-time employment, serve as vivid examples of the importance of participating in a program like RAP or of getting a higher education. Dean, the electrician apprentice who commented on his older brother's failure to participate in RAP, explains (Edmonton RAP Focus Group, February 11, 2002):

> Dean: Actually, I think it was going to work [summer job] and talking to all the people your parents' age that never finished high school and stuff. You work side by side with a 40 year old, the age of your mother or whatever, and they're making like 50 cents more than you an hour. And they've been at this job for years. You know, they're going nowhere and they're as old as your parents. ... I never want to be 35 years old, busting my ass and making the same as a 17 year-old kid, OK.

Not surprisingly, the typical "student job" is also a strong motivator for Edmonton academic high school students (Edmonton Academic Focus Group, December 13, 2001):

> Luisa: It made me realize that some of the people working there, like some of them are over 40 and they're still working there just to scrape up like $6.70 an hour, and that made me, like, yeah, I have to quit and get my grades up high so that I'm not working there when I'm 40 either. Because I want to get ready to retire by 50, 60. And that just like motivates people even more. Like you see people working fast food places and they're older, it's like, uh, do I really wanna be doing this at that point in my life? So, I think it helps you realize if you get the grades you can do something with a diploma.
>
> ...
>
> Molly: Almost every day she [my mother] says the same thing, like "you want to spend the rest of your life working for $5.90?" Every day! Yesterday she said it [others laugh]. I hear that, too, so I want to keep like ... you know what I mean, I don't want to spend the rest of my life working at a clothing store for like $6. Like I work with one lady, she's worked there for 45 years! She's never done anything else, she didn't even graduate ... like, retard [others laugh].

However, many youth apprentices see the spectre of such employment in the future as a more real possibility than do academic mainstream kids. Thus, they are more likely to highlight the immediate consequences of making a bad decision (Edmonton RAP Focus Group, October 9, 2002):

WL: Do you think that jobs you've had in the past had an influence on your decision?

Bonnie: That's pretty much it, everything. I worked at a car wash with all the high school dropouts and drug addicts; and I looked at them and I'm like, I can't do that to myself. I have to become more than that. And I've worked since 12 years old at this car wash with these … [takes breath] … idiots [laughs], I couldn't do it. I'm just like, oh, that's disgusting [exaggerated voice]. That's pretty much the main reason I stayed in high school.

Liz: I worked at [fast food restaurant] and I said no way; there's no way I'm flipping burgers, making donuts for the rest of my life.

Media

While an investigation of the role of popular media in the development of dispositions toward post-secondary destinations was not part of this study, the discussions in the interviews and focus groups nevertheless revealed some media-related influences. For instance, the relatively high number of young people both in Edmonton and Bremen apprenticing as chefs may well be related to the recent trend of treating chefs like supermodels, entire cable TV channels dedicated to cooking (The Food Network), and the success of hip (The Naked Chef) or plain wacky (The Iron Chef) cooking shows.

One interesting observation, as far as media influences are concerned, is that the more unique the career aspirations, the more likely these aspirations are inspired by television or other media. Consider, for instance, the following excerpts from conversations with two Edmonton academic-track high school students and one student at a Bremen *Gymnasium*. Joshua wants to become a jet pilot in the military, Chad is interested in robotics, and Alfred wants to become a foreign correspondent for German television.

(Edmonton Academic Focus Group, December 13, 2001):

Joshua: Well, I like the military. I really just like that kind of glory thing; when you see the guys on TV.

(Edmonton Academic Individual Interview, December 14, 2001):
WL: What do you want to get into?
Chad: [pause] Mm, ... I'm not 100 percent sure, like ... there is the ... I'd really like to go into robotics, because ever since I saw that show one time, *Robotwars*, I've kind of liked it and I want to like work with robots. [And there are other] shows I see on TV, instead of just *Robotwars*, that like in space, they send like those robots up … like the planet or whatever. And for like caves exploration, they use robots instead of sending humans in. Or to defuse a bomb, and that type of stuff.
…
WL: If you look at robotics, do you have any role models that you could follow or talk to?
Chad: … Robotics-wise, it's just these guys on the TV show, just watching what they build and spending their time doing this. Some of them spend time with their kids, painting and building and all that stuff with the robots.

(Bremen Academic Focus Group, May 29, 2002):
WL: How did you decide on your career plan? Did you talk to your parents, do you have any role models that do that type of work?
Alfred: Well, I was always impressed by foreign correspondents who report from wars, or generally from all sorts of places around the world. And then I thought, yeah, that could be something for me. I like to speak languages, maybe that would be a way, that's what I thought.

It might be interesting to note that in none of the three cases did the students come from the type of highly-educated social background that their career choices would require, which might explain their turn toward popular media as a source of inspiration.

I also found that the Internet played no role in the formation of career dispositions of the young people in my study. Apart from the use of computer-based information material at school career centres or the German network of employment centres (*Arbeitsamt*), none of the participants mentioned the Internet as a source that influenced their career choices. This finding certainly warrants further investigation, given that policy-makers increasingly propose turning to the Internet in order to reach young people.

A final note on the role of media involves the unexpectedly high number of (male) RAP participants in the study who confessed to thinking about becoming firefighters as an alternative to their current career plans. While this finding has really no significant bearing on my study, I thought it still warrants a comment, since I believe it reflects the attention firefighting as a profession received in the wake of the September 11, 2001 attacks on the World Trade Centre in New York City (most interviews were carried out only weeks or months after the events in New York). Images of heroic firefighters were hard to escape in the days following the tragedy and news stories celebrating them as the true heroes in the rescue efforts after the attack were ubiquitous. Obviously, this form of positive stereotyping does rub off on young people (all male), particularly those with very little actual knowledge about this profession.

Tyler, a RAP student, who is working as a heavy-duty apprentice in Edmonton, talks about his dream of becoming a firefighter, which seems to be mostly inspired by the adrenaline rush being a firefighter is supposed to provide, and the fact that firefighters are generally nice, well-liked people (Edmonton RAP Individual Interview, November 29, 2001):

> WL: If you had to make a plan and maybe you already have one, over the next 5 or 10 years, how ideally would you like to see yourself?
> Tyler: Just go do whatever I can to be a firefighter.
> WL: Do you know what it takes, what the requirements to become a firefighter are?
> ...
> Tyler: Basically it's just physical fitness. Like, basically that's pretty much it. And a high school diploma.
> ...
> WL: I find it interesting because you have all this work experience in this trade. You have a lot of family, uncles that work in other trades. So I see the connection there. Your parents are in white-collar work. But your real goal is a firefighter. Where did that come from?

Tyler: I don't know. You get to help people. It's got to be a pretty big adrenaline rush, you know? Like, running in there and grabbing someone or something?
WL: Might get scary! (laugh)
Tyler: Yeah.
WL: Do you know anyone who is a firefighter?
Tyler: Actually a bunch of my dad's old buddies were firefighters. I don't know them though.
WL: Have you ever had a chance to talk to them?
Tyler: Yeah.
WL: What did they think of this idea?
Tyler: They think it's awesome. I've never met a mean firefighter either, you know? They always seem like real happy guys too.

Interestingly, but not surprisingly, the only RAP participant in the study whose father actually is a firefighter and who thus has a more intimate knowledge of firefighting as a career, is the one who most vehemently rejects the idea of becoming a firefighter himself (Edmonton RAP Individual Interview, November 28, 2001):

WL: Did you ever want to become a firefighter?
Matt: No.
WL: Do you talk with your dad about his work?
Matt: Yeah, a bit.
WL: What kinds of things did you not like about firefighting?
Matt: I don't know … it's pretty dangerous.

Summary

Overwhelmingly, study participants in all four sub-samples insisted on the independent formation of their dispositions toward transitions from high school (Chapter 5). Chapter 6 showed how institutional contexts (e.g., the streaming process in Germany's tripartite secondary education system) were not raised as issues. However, the influence of significant others was acknowledged insofar as they served as credible role models for the chosen careers (Chapter 7). For instance, in cases where youth apprentices had parents (usually fathers) working in the same field, their influence was acknowledged for providing insights into the career, but not as a parental influence per se. Although equally adamant that final career decisions were their own, academic-track high school students were more willing to acknowledge the influence of their parents, or to seek further advice from their parents for their final decision. This was the case particularly for those students whose parents had attended university themselves. As with youth apprentices, parents' credibility was based on how their experiences related to the plans of the participants. There were some exceptions, however, in which participants spoke about their parents as anti-role models whose "failure" to do well in their careers served as an inspiration to do better.

Birkelbach (2001) argues that the plans, wishes, and aspirations of parents are results of their own life course experiences, their own judgement of accomplishments and failures, and the social positions they have achieved. In other words, most parents want their children to have it better (or at least as good) as they have. This was particularly obvious in the case of a number of Edmonton academic-track high school students in my study, whose parents (usually fathers) had a background of working in the trades but were strongly advising their children against following in their footsteps because the work is too hard, or too dirty, or generally of little value.

Similarly, peers were reported as influences on dispositions if they were seen to be credible informants. For instance, many Edmonton youth apprentices first learned about RAP from former participants who were able to provide "first-hand" information about the advantages of participation. A number of German academic-track students saw their wishes to study at university confirmed by older friends who had already moved from *Gymnasium* to university. These influences also serve as a reminder of how the peer group may be an important element in reinforcing dispositions shaped through habitus.

Although participants on their own rarely raised the influence of teachers and counsellors, more probing on my part revealed that they do play a very important role in transition processes. I did find that vocational education teachers encouraged most of the Edmonton RAP students to participate in the program (or at least alerted them to RAP as an alternative to the academic-track mainstream), because they had recognized an aptitude for manual work. Similarly, academic-track students receive encouragement from academic-track teachers to seek out university studies.

The cross-national comparison revealed that there were remarkably few differences between the Edmonton and Bremen participants. In both countries, academic-track students were more willing to acknowledge the influence of others (particularly parents), while youth apprentices insisted on the independent formation of dispositions toward their careers. None of the German participants reflected on the tremendous influence their parents have over their placement into one of the three secondary school types after Grade 4. After six years in a specific stream, the German participants had obviously accepted their school placement as a social reality outside their control—a social reality which they neither could nor felt the need to challenge. In a sense, the structural constraints of this streaming had created an ontological security (Giddens 1984) from which they now felt able to chart their future life course.

However, despite the similar attitudes of the Edmonton and Bremen participants, I argue that the basis for these attitudes is different. Edmonton youth apprentices seemed concerned with their independence over the transitions process as a way of confirming their newly-found sense of adulthood and maturity (see also Chapter 9). While this is still important to the Bremen youth apprentices, I argue that their sense of independence is also the result of the more transparent structures in Germany's education system and labour market. The influence of parents and significant others appears to become less important in a system in which individuals can draw on clear and transparent pathways, supported by an infrastructure of information and counselling services.

What then is the answer to research question 3, which asked about the extent to which young people perceive their participation in either academic-track high school programs or youth apprenticeship programs, and subsequent transition plans, as being shaped by structural elements or as the result of active choice? In their mind, the answer is clearly that, ultimately, the final decision was their own. However, the discussion of the institutional context framing school-work transitions (Chapter 6) and the findings in this chapter have shown that participants' initial insistence on the independent, purely interest-based formation of dispositions toward post-high school plans is open to question if one probes a little deeper into these relationships. Yet, none of the participants in this study interpreted these various influences as creating and reinforcing social advantages and disadvantages. It is therefore necessary to go beyond a largely descriptive discussion of the interview and focus group data, and move into a more interpretive analysis of how participants' stories reveal narratives of reproduction.

Chapter 8

Narratives of Reproduction: "It's Just What My Family Does"

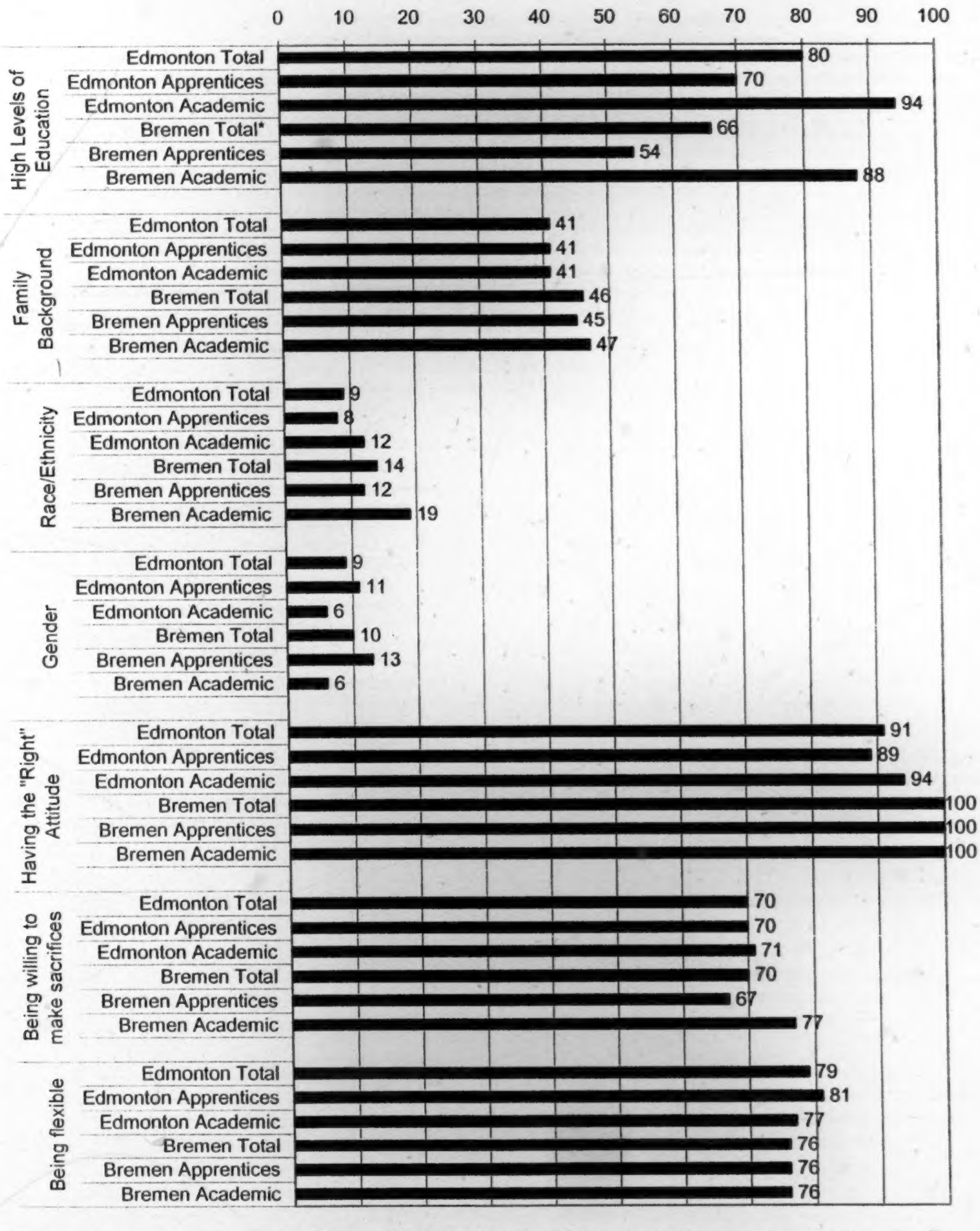
In the previous three chapters, I presented a largely descriptive analysis of participants' accounts of their own decision making, as well as their understanding of the ways in which institutional and social contexts may have shaped their transition plans. In the following two chapters, I will provide a more interpretative account of the data. Both chapters address research question 4, which asks how individuals' accounts of agency can be interpreted, given the socially reproductive impact of structural elements, and how these findings relate to the theoretical literature discussed in Chapter 3. Thus, I am most interested in analyzing narratives of reproduction evident in participants' stories, as well as individual strategies young people apply to make sense of transitions and to shape their life course. Bourdieu's notions of *habitus* and *cultural capital* assume central importance both in the analysis of reproductive processes and individual strategies.

Before engaging in this interpretive analysis, however, it would be instructive to examine some quantitative data on study participants' own sense of the potentially reproductive processes and factors affecting the achievement of their career goals. The survey administered at the end of interviews and focus groups included a set of questions that asked respondents to rate, on a five-point scale (with 1 indicating "not important at all" and 5 indicating "very important'), the importance of various structural factors for achieving career goals (Appendix F, Question 22). The structural factors in Figure 1 below include family background, race or ethnicity, and gender. The same question also asked respondents to rank the importance of individual strategies (or actions) for the achievement of career goals. These include "having the right attitude," "being willing to make some sacrifices," and "being flexible." In other words, these are measures of what might be called "pseudo-agency." While they mimic a public discourse that suggests everything is possible if one just tries hard enough, they also allow us to investigate the extent to which young people buy into this ethos or are aware of the degrees to which achievement is circumscribed by factors of structural inequality (like class, race, or gender). A final measure is reserved for the amount of importance youth apprentices and academic-track high school students accord educational attainment.

Figure 1 shows that youth apprentices and academic-track high school students answered differently only for educational attainment. As is to be expected, academic-track high school students were more likely to rate high levels of educational attainment as important for career success. This difference was more pronounced in the Bremen sub-sample, which may be explained by the fact that training in the dual system has traditionally led to very stable and well-paying careers. Youth apprentices in Bremen may therefore be more confident about success without higher levels of post-secondary education.

There were no differences in how the four sub-samples (Edmonton Apprentices, Edmonton Academic, Bremen Apprentices, Bremen Academic) rated the influence of structural factors on the achievement of career goals. While family background was actually recognized by almost half of all participants as playing an important role in achieving career goals, only a very small minority of respondents considered race or gender as having any impact. In fact, what is most significant in Figure 1 are the big differences between individual and structural factors, the former being seen as much more important for career success.

Figure 1. Attitudes About Factors Affecting Achievement of Career Goals, by Type of Program and Location (Percent Important and Very Important)



Respondents answered question: "On a scale from 1 to 5, with five indicating very important, generally how important do you think are the following for achieving career goals?" Responses in categories one to three were recoded as not important, responses in categories four and five were recoded as important.
* Differences significant at the p<0.01 level

In fact, all four sub-samples uniformly stressed the importance of being motivated, having the right attitude, and being flexible as important prerequisites for achieving one's career goals. These findings might be somewhat surprising, as one might expect a greater sense of class consciousness amongst the Bremen participants. After all, Canada is generally considered a less class-based society, and earlier findings in this study have highlighted the class-based stratification of Germany's education system. Yet, this emphasis on individual effort over structural constraints regarding occupational success has also been confirmed by other research (Berger, Brandes, and Walden 2000).

Despite these very optimistic attitudes, a closer look at the interview and focus group data revealed a rather different story.

Habitus and Cultural Capital

If habitus is indeed "history turned into nature," as Bourdieu argues (Bourdieu 1977, 78), then we should find that individuals' upbringing, their social environment, and the things they do with their families, contribute to their overall dispositions toward a career. Tim, who apprentices as a millwright in RAP and whose father is employed in the trades, describes his relationship with the type of career he has chosen in rather vivid, almost deterministic terms (Edmonton RAP Individual Interview, November 22, 2001):

> Tim: I've been working with my dad [in construction] for five years.
> WL: And obviously that was a good enough experience for you to still be interested in going into a trade?
> Tim: I've always enjoyed working in a trade. *It's just what my family does* and I just seem to enjoy working with my hands rather than working with my mind all the time (my emphasis).
> …
> WL: Do you find that with your family at home, doing things with your hands was always quite important?

Tim: My family's been like that for all their lives and *I just had to grow into it*, I guess (my emphasis).

Although Tim clearly enjoys his work and expresses satisfaction with his decision to join RAP, there is a sense of fatalism in his suggestion that he "had to grow into" manual work, as this is what his family has done all their lives. In Bourdieu's terms, Tim's comments are evidence of an embodiment of structure; his dispositions toward a career in the trades are the result of "a past which survives in the present and tends to perpetuate itself into the future" (Bourdieu 1977, 82).

Rather similarly, Dean and Ted, both apprentices in RAP, talk about the social (or maybe occupational) environment in which they grew up and which obviously shaped their dispositions toward work (Edmonton RAP Focus Group, February 11, 2002):

Dean: No, nobody in my family ever went to college or university. My brother is the first one who graduated high school last year. [unintelligible] we're a whole trades family.
Ted: Nobody in my family went [to university] … trades, that's about it. If you do anything, it's always a trade.
…
WL: Were you at any point ever interested at aiming for university?
Ted: No. I knew probably in Grade 9 I was never going to university. I was just going for a trade in something. … [mostly unintelligible] Don't care for words [books?] … no motivation [unintelligible]
Nick: Yeah, that's how I was. Like seeing it get done, not hearing about how it gets done.
Ted: That's how I am. You can tell me how to do something and I'll forget. I can watch you and I can do it, no problem.
Nick: I actually have to do it myself to learn.
…
Dean: … I've always been good with my hands, … I've never been book smart at all, I'm [unintelligible] when it comes to doing like writing work. But if you put me in like a shop, I can build just about anything … [unintelligible] … I'm good with my hands, I'm not good with my head.

This conversation illustrates how habitus and cultural capital intersect to create a remarkably strong set of dispositions toward education and work. And although interview participants like Ted, Dean, and Nick may not be conscious of the way in which their SES and their upbringing contribute to their specific sets of dispositions toward manual work, they are able to justify their preference for this type of career as opposed to considering university as an option. This intersection between habitus, cultural capital and dispositions toward work was remarkably similar for the German apprentices. Consider, for instance, the following conversation between Matthias, Thomas, and Steffen, all of whom are apprenticing as car mechanics (Bremen Apprentices Focus Group, May 14, 2002):

> WL: I just want to talk about your families a little more. Almost all of you have been fixing up cars with your dads and developed an interest that way. In your families, was there also any pressure to do well at school or to do bookish things, like reading, writing, and so on.
>
> . . .
>
> Matthias: For me it was more manual, trades work.
>
> Thomas: They [my parents] said it doesn't matter if you're stupid, as long as you work.
>
> Steffen: I think the way my dad did it was really quite good. He put out his hand and I was supposed to give him whatever tools he needed. If you don't think, then you'll get the wrench whacked over your head, if it's the wrong one.

Rudy is apprenticing as a roofer in Bremen. His explanation of why he started his apprenticeship, despite being warned about the job by experienced workers in the occupation during an internship, is even more telling (Bremen Apprentices Focus Group, May 22, 2002):

> WL: Did anybody warn you about the job?
>
> Bert: Yes, the journeymen themselves. They said, don't do it, it's hard work and so on. But, I don't know.

Rudy: Yeah, I got that too, in my internship. Before I started my apprenticeship, they all said "train for something different, not this job. It's no good."
WL: Why did you do it anyway?
Rudy: Well, because … I looked at my [*Hauptschule*] diploma and marks, and thought to myself … in my family, almost everybody works in construction, and then I thought, why shouldn't I do it myself?

Not all of the students I interviewed are as clear on this issue. Debbie entered RAP as a hairdressing apprentice, although she agrees that her parents initially had hopes for her to go to university instead (Edmonton RAP Individual Interview, November 23, 2001):

WL: Did [your parents] ever, at any point, when you were younger, want you to go to university or work towards university?
Debbie: Yeah.
WL: Was that their hope for you at one point?
Debbie: Of course, every parent wants that, right? They really wanted me to go to the university.
WL: Had they been to university themselves?
Debbie: No, they haven't.
WL: And, were you ever really wanting to go to university throughout school, up to now?
WL: No, I wasn't.
WL: Never?
Debbie: No.
WL: How come not?
Debbie: I'm not sure. I'm not sure at all.

Her comments on why she never considered university as an option are a vivid reminder of habitus as encapsulating the ways in which a person's dispositions are "influenced by the objective social networks and cultural traditions in which that person lives" (Hodkinson and Sparkes 1997, 33). As both of Debbie's parents have relatively low levels of educational attainment and are engaged in manual labour, Debbie's lack of interest in university is the result of habitus that, according to Swartz (1997, 105), provides a "practical and taken-for-granted acceptance of the fundamental conditions of existence."

Just as a working-class home creates a very powerful set of dispositions toward a manual career, the families of the most confident academic-track students are characterized by an emphasis on doing well at school and aiming for university. We have already heard from Alissa, an Edmonton high school student with plans to study in the social sciences, when she talked about her parents' role in "planting the seed and opening her eyes" to the possibility of going to university. Although she insists that the final decision to go to university will be her own, this decision will nevertheless be based on a very powerful set of dispositions, habitually enforced through a home which is characterized by her parents' relatively high level of occupational attainment (Edmonton Academic Focus Group, February 13, 2002):

> Alissa: Um … ever since I was little, throughout the whole thing, it's always been "you're going to go to university" or you're gonna at least go to college …
> WL: From your parents?
> Alissa: Yeah, from my parents a lot. And like even my grandma, she put away some money for me and when she passes away I'm getting that. And it's only to be used for tuition. But, it's always been, you know, "you're gonna go to university" and that's never been an issue for me.

The fact that going to university has "never been an issue" for her suggests that her range of post-secondary options is as much constrained as that of working-class children choosing to go into youth apprenticeships. Part of this set of dispositions is certainly an expression of the North American ethic of social mobility through educational attainment. This ethic is not lost on the young people in the study, as the following comments from Rhonda, an Edmonton hairdressing apprentice, show (Edmonton RAP Focus Group, October 9, 2002):

> WL: Do you think if you want to go to university it helps if you have parents that have been to university?
>
> Rhonda: I would think so. I look at some of my friends and they spend their life doing homework, because their parents put that on them. That they have to have these certain marks because they have to go to university. And it's just … education is everything.

However, these relationships between habitus, cultural capital, SES, and dispositions are not necessarily as straightforward and deterministic as the above comments suggest. Consider, for instance, how Nadine, an Edmonton academic-track high school student with plans to study biology at university, interprets this relationship (Edmonton Academic Focus Group, February 13, 2002):

> Nadine: I think it pretty much has a positive influence, no matter what your family background, because … say if you lived in the slums and your parents had no education and you grew up in a box, it would make you … I don't know, it would give you greater perseverance and determination to overcome anything that comes at you.

It is important to note here that Nadine has a "vested interest" in feeling this way, as her socio-economic background should effectively prevent her from success in higher education. Nadine has been raised by a single mother who did not graduate from high school and who works as a housekeeper in a hotel. If habitus was understood as a completely determinist principle that reproduces social relations via SES, Nadine's decision to study at university would be doomed from the outset. Either that or, if she succeeds, the concept of habitus could be discarded as inadequate for explaining social inequality. Obviously, many critics of Bourdieu have taken the second stance (e.g., Jenkins 1992). For instance, Brown (1987) criticizes Bourdieu's concept of habitus and its implication in cultural reproduction through the education system (Bourdieu and Passeron 1977) as representing "little more than a bundle of values and attributes which predispose children unequally to master the middle-class culture taught in school" (Brown 1987, 30). He goes on to suggest that:

> If differences in the habitus of working-class children and the way in which the structure and organization of the educational system acts to reinforce or transform it had been clearly specified, the idea of habitus might have offered a way of overcoming approaches relying either on the process of educational or on cultural differentiation (ibid., 29).

However, I propose that Nadine's story provides a compelling example in which cultural capital and habitus affect dispositions toward post-secondary education (Edmonton Academic Focus Group, February 13, 2002):

> Nadine: I guess I wouldn't really have a role model either, except for, you know, … my mom's kind of what I don't want to be. She's a …
> Jillian: … anti-role model?
> Nadine: No, she's not quite that, but she's been housekeeping all her life and I actually took the same job for a while and I realized how hard that can be, too. She even told me, she's like "don't get stuck in this". … Um, I guess the lesson I learned from my mother, uh, was not to be dependent, you know, to make sure that you can take care of yourself. So, part of the reason why I want to go to university is so I will always be able to take care of myself.
> …
> Nadine: I [did feel] pressure from my family. It always seemed like it didn't really matter to them what I did, like they were trying to say, you know, that it doesn't really matter what you do, but it really does matter to them. I don't know, it's just … I'm the youngest of five children and of that only two have graduated so far from high school, and they just have huge expectations for me. And that's OK, that's fine, because, [going to university], that's the same thing I want for myself.

Obviously, Nadine's plans are a response to her understanding of her mother's situation and life chances, as well as her own social position. Yet, her case defies the straightforward logic of habitus and cultural capital reproducing class positions, although I would insist that habitus is still instrumental for her post-secondary education plans. The same cannot be argued for the other situation defying the logic of social reproduction, namely that of downward social mobility. The few participants in my study who decided to enter apprenticeships despite their relatively advantaged social status (e.g., Doug and Ron are Edmonton youth apprentices whose parents are university-educated) still kept open the possibility to eventually attend university (i.e., they were about to graduate from high school with all the necessary courses and marks). Their move into a trades career was thus not necessarily a permanent departure from their social status.

Unlike the more deterministic way in which habitus created sets of dispositions that essentially predisposed Debbie toward non-academic post-secondary training and Alissa toward university, Nadine's habitus and dispositions are as much shaped by her family's lower SES as they are by their hopes and expectations. Her mother's hopes for her to do better and her expectations for her to go to university, it seems, have been strong and consistent influences, shaping habitus and dispositions in a complex and non-deterministic fashion. Nadine's experiences are thus more exemplary of dispositions understood as an open system. Bourdieu himself argues that

> Habitus is not the fate that some people read into it. Being the product of history, it is an *open system of dispositions* that is constantly subject to experiences, and therefore constantly affected by them in a way that either reinforces or modifies structures. (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992, 133, emphasis in original)

Although the overall quantitative trend in my sample confirmed social reproduction, it appears that Nadine is about to "break through" the "prescribed," reproductive ways in which habitus has shaped most of her siblings' life course so far. Yet, this form of agency does come at the cost of risk and uncertainty.

Risk and Uncertainty

Nadine's comments highlight discrepancies between habitus and dispositions, as Nadine's habitus should indeed prevent her from success in higher post-secondary education. Not surprisingly, Nadine is indeed aware of this dilemma (Edmonton Academic Focus Group, February 13, 2002):

> Nadine: I think if I did have a parent who went to university it'd be a lot more comfortable, because they'd know what you need to do. Like, I had to figure out completely on my own what I need to do, like applications and figuring out my student loans and everything like that. I just think it would be way easier if I had someone who knew what it's like.

Nadine's decision to attend university is an expression of what Evans and Heinz (1995) have called *strategic risk taking*, as university is a choice that is, from a structurally determinist perspective, in conflict with her social origin. These plans are also characterized by more uncertainty and represent a greater risk to her than they do for somebody with a higher SES. This feeling of uncertainty is in contrast to the far more relaxed and anticipatory attitude of academic-track high school students with university-educated parents, as the following two focus group excerpts attest:

> (Edmonton Academic Focus Group, December 6, 2001):
> Alissa: It's kind of comforting to have a parent, like my dad went in. But, he went to university how many years ago now? [laughs] I think things have probably changed a bit since then …

(Bremen Academic Focus Group, May 24, 2002):

Silke: I … my dad, he studied medicine. He talks a lot about it. It always sounds like a lot of fun, when he talks about it.

Trent, one of the Edmonton academic-track students, is a near-textbook example of a student from a working-class background who has been pushed by his father (who has worked in construction all his life) to consider university as a way out of the hard labour he himself experiences (Edmonton Academic Focus Group, February 13, 2002):

WL: You said earlier that your father is in construction. Did he at any point suggest you go into that area?

Trent: No. He hates … like when I went to work with him, and he works like a dog, probably ten hours a day. He's done that for about twenty years, you know. And I look how hard he works and I appreciate what he does, but he always tells me "no, you're not doing this!" … You know, my whole life he's told me not to get into this, so I don't even bother.

Yet, as with Nadine, this drive for upward mobility comes at a cost of higher risk and uncertainty. Trent's plan is to go to university after completing high school, but has no plans yet as to what he wants to study. He is also rather concerned about what it means to be at university and where it eventually might lead him. Lacking a frame of reference or role models in his immediate social environment, the decision to go to university seems as much a burden as it is liberation from the hard manual labour of his father (Edmonton Academic Focus Group, February 13, 2002):

Trent: Yeah, I can honestly say I don't know what to expect from university, because I don't really know anyone who has ever been there. … I just don't want to pick the wrong thing, like I don't want to end up taking five years of extra school and then when you go to the job market, then all of sudden there is nothing there for you. … For some reason, I get a little scared thinking about the workload. People say that they are dropping out, like the mass of people that are dropping out, that quit in their first year.

WL: You mean at university?

Trent: Yeah. That just kind of scares me a little bit, but … as long as you work as hard as you possibly can, then that should be alright. But that's what scares me, just the workload and the mass of people that drop out in their first year, you know.

…

WL: [Do you think] it might be more difficult for somebody like yourself whose parents haven't been to university to go and be successful there?

Trent: Oh yeah, because they can tell you what it's like.

Don is similar to Trent in that his father works as a painter in the trades but wants him to do better. Don faces the problem of actually not performing well enough in high school to go directly to university, as his parents had hoped. Instead, he has opted to take engineering-related courses at a local technical school. Unlike Trent, whose father's comments have left him convinced that he definitely does not want to follow in his footsteps, Don expresses an interest in the trades but isn't acting on it, which suggests that his father's influence is fairly significant (Edmonton Academic Individual Interview, December 14, 2001):

Don: Well, [my parents] wanted me to go straight to university, but the marks aren't there.

…

WL: Particularly your dad being in the trade, has he ever talked to you about possibly going into the trade?

Don: He told me NOT to go into the trade. It's too hard work, it's too much physical work; not to do it.

…

WL: So, would you say that your parents, or particularly your dad, have always pushed you towards academic stuff?

Don: Yeah, all the time.

WL: Do you think the fact that your parents themselves haven't been in an academic career, that makes it harder to think about that?

Don: Yes, because they don't really know what it's like, what the difference is. They just think this is better, take it. That's about it.

WL: So you think they're mostly concerned about your welfare, your well-being? Do you agree with them?

Don: [somewhat hesitant] It makes sense.

…

WL: You said earlier that being a mechanic, a car mechanic maybe, interested you. …
Don: … I love working on cars, even though it is tiring, but it doesn't really matter.
WL: So is that anything you still keep as a possibility, in the back of your mind?
Don: Kind of [laughs] …
…
WL: … If you were pretty certain that you want to be a car mechanic, do you think your dad would try to convince you not to do that?
Don: Yeah, for sure [laughs]. I talked to him about it. He said it's not a good idea.

Here then is a situation in which habitus, dispositions, and expectations are clearly in conflict. Don's interest in cars and manual work is as much a reflection of his habitus as going to university is not. Yet, there is a strong push from his parents to choose a different future, one they themselves could not have. And the path to this future is seen as achievable through educational attainment.[36]

High school students like Nadine, Trent, and Don are cases of what I earlier discussed as structured individualization (Roberts, Clark, and Wallace 1994; Rudd and Evans 1989) or bounded agency (Evans 2002). Both these terms imply that agency, and the outcomes of agency, continue to be circumscribed by the individuals' location in the social structure. Their narratives show forms of agency (or individualization) that are strongly framed by social origin, or habitus. The likelihood of success at university is probably still lower, and the level of risk involved certainly higher, for students with a lower SES. Contrasting the narratives of independent decision making with the survey findings discussed in Chapter 5 certainly provides evidence of such bounded agency. However, what is interesting in this discussion of risk and uncertainty is the fact that the narratives of at least some of the students whose post-secondary plans would lead to upward social mobility (e.g., Trent and Don) actually reveal a relative lack of agency. For both Trent and Don, the most important motivating factor to attend university appears to be their parents' wishes that they do so. In contrast, the decisions of most youth apprentices to enter a trade may best be described as socially reproductive, they often passionately speak of their pride in the physical, manual labour they perform and how their participation is a result of a real personal interest in this type of work. Once again, we are faced with the dilemma of consolidating narratives of agency with structural evidence of reproduction.

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[36] See also Sennett and Cobb (1972), who wrote about how the American ethos of social mobility affects parents.

Apart from these individual explanations of uncertainty, institutional factors may also play an important role. For instance, in comparison to Edmonton high school students like Trent and Don, who are planning on studying at university, but who are somewhat concerned about their lack of understanding of what this entails, their German equivalents seem less concerned with these issues. This may be explained by the fact that they are attending classes in the highest school stream (*Gymnasium*), which has as its aim preparation for university entry. In other words, the institutional environment is clearly geared toward a certain transition path. The focus of curriculum is on university preparation, teachers emphasize university preparation, and most friends probably plan on attending university. Consider, for instance, the following conversation between Sandra and Simone, both Bremen *Gymnasium* students who have very ambitious career plans (lawyer and doctor, respectively), but whose parents have not been to university (Bremen Academic Focus Group, May 24, 2002):

> Sandra: Well in my case, nobody in my family went to university. But I think if I manage to do well here at the *Gymnasium* and finish with a good

Abitur, I mean, if I don't have any big problems, then I do want to go to university. Then, I think, it won't get a lot more difficult.

. . .

Simone: I don't know anybody who is at university right now or has been. My parents didn't go. I don't know. I think that you'll have to do a whole lot on your own, that you won't have teachers, like here at school, who will tell you, "do this or do that." That's why I'm not nor sure if I'll be able to do it all on my own.

WL: Do you think it makes it more difficult if you don't have anybody in your family who has had those experiences, who could support you a bit?

Simone: I don't think it makes a difference, because they [those who have parents who have gone to university] didn't experience university themselves; they were only told about it. That's why I think it doesn't make a difference.

The fact that Sandra and Simone appear to be far less concerned about uncertainty, and that they perceive going to university as less of a risk than their Edmonton counterparts, might be related to the earlier discussions of the greater level of transparency in the German education system. Students at the *Gymnasium* level have become so much a part of a school culture that is based on preparation for university that their understanding of what being at university entails might be far greater than that of similar Edmonton high school students. This in turn takes away much of the mystique and uncertainty surrounding university life. This suggests that schools, school culture, curriculum, and interaction with teachers play an important role in reinforcing habitus and dispositions.

Role of the Schools

In the previous section, I explained how cultural capital and SES interact to form habitus and dispositions within the family realm that ultimately affect career decision making and may contribute to social reproduction. Schools and the education system comprise another important field in which habitual dispositions may be cemented, or possibly altered. In *Reproduction in Education, Society and Culture*, Bourdieu (with Passeron) analyzes how the education system perpetuates and legitimizes social inequality (Bourdieu and Passeron 1977). Middle- and upper-middle-class ideologies dominate curriculum, making it easier for children who grew up with this form of cultural capital to succeed in school, while the value of working-class knowledge and experiences is generally rejected. Students rich in cultural capital are better able to understand the value of an education, are more in tune with what is taught, and are in turn rewarded through better grades and generally better and more supportive relationships with their teachers. Working-class children find little in the curriculum that reflects their own experiences and tend to become increasingly alienated from the school culture, which leads to less success, vocational streaming, or even dropping out. This relationship is, of course, intimately related to the career decision-making process, as educational success and encouragement provide the foundation for the consideration of post-secondary destinations. In this context, RAP, as a high school program, offers an interesting theoretical conundrum: is it a program that actually validates working-class knowledge in the education system, or is it a mechanism that formalizes social inequality and cultural reproduction by removing young people more interested in manual knowledge from the academic mainstream?

Relationship with Curriculum

Many of the RAP students with whom I spoke revealed an attitude toward school that can at best be described as indifferent. They usually had no problems talking about their lack of success at school. For many of these students, success at school was only important insofar as graduating with a high school diploma is a requirement for continuing their apprenticeship training (Edmonton RAP Individual Interview, November 28, 2001):

Brad: … I'm not that good at school. I get passing grades, but … it's just not something … somewhere I want to be. I gotta be doing something with my hands.

WL: Did your parents push you to do well at school?

Brad: No, my dad says, if I get a 50, and that's as good as I can do and I tried my hardest, then that's good enough.

Reflecting Bourdieu's concepts of habitus and cultural capital, Dean, Ted, Doug, and Nick talk about their lack of interest in school curriculum and how this extends to their leisure activities (Edmonton RAP Focus Group, February 11, 2002):

WL: Do any of you at home do 'bookish' things?

Dean: Magazines.

Ted: I read the TV guide. Sports and news.

Doug: I read the books to my Nintendo games.

Nick: I read books and magazines … [everybody talking at the same time, agreeing that they are not big readers] … stuff that I like.

Teds: You don't see me get down and read like a 20 page … or uh, 200 page novel. That's just not for me.

WL: Do you have to do it for school?

Ted: They try to, but I don't do it. I just get somebody else's answers. I hate it, it's horrible. I hate reading books. … Read the back, and if I can't do it that way, hopefully it has a movie, I'll watch the movie.

As the following focus group excerpt shows, the streamed education system in Germany has the potential to exacerbate young people's feeling of alienation from education (Bremen Apprentices Focus Group, May 30, 2002):

Attila: Almost all of us went to the *Hauptschule*, and right from the start, we didn't really give a shit about learning [laughs].

Bernd: That's right.

Uwe: Ten years at school, you know, that's enough.

This, of course, is in marked contrast to academic students. For them, success in high school and an acceptance of the high school culture is essential, not only for their chances to be accepted to the post-secondary program of their choice, but also to confirm their identity (Edmonton Academic Focus Group, December 6, 2001):

> Lisa: … in school, it's not so much teaching you, like … "yeah, you got to memorize, like all these kings from like 1,600 years ago." [But] they're teaching you how to learn, how to use your mind. And if they didn't teach you how to learn, how would you go out in the real world and like survive, if you didn't know how to learn. Like going to a job with computers, they had to teach you how to … use that computer or whatever. But if you had not gone to school and learned how to commit that to memory or whatever, you could not learn how to work that computer. So, even at school they are setting you up for the real world. [others laugh] … You know it's true.
> [others agree, somebody: "yeah, it's very true"]
> WL: So, you would say you certainly learn more important things at school?
> Lisa: Not just … important, yes, but also relevant to the real world.
> …
> Max: I'd have to say that's right on the button.

It would be unfair to suggest that all youth apprentices in my sample rejected school, just as it would be wrong to say that all academic students saw the value in everything they learned in school. Thus, you find apprentices like Peter in Edmonton who likes Shakespeare and enjoys reading Macbeth, and academic students like Farida in Germany who claims that "there is a reason why they say you learn for teachers, not for life." Yet, there is an overwhelming sense among youth apprentices that the school system is not validating their interests and skills, which in turn contributes to a vicious cycle of low achievement and little interest in core educational subjects.

These qualitative findings are further confirmed by responses to questions about attitudes toward education I asked in my survey (Appendix F, Question 18). As Table 29 shows, youth apprentices indeed prefer the applied form of learning they experience at work, and are more likely to agree that they do not enjoy school as much as work.

Table 29. Attitudes About School, by Type of Program

		Apprentices	Academic-track	Total
What we learn at high school will be more important to getting a good job than any work experience*	Disagree	52 84%	23 57%	75 74%
	Agree	10 16%	17 43%	27 26%
	Total	62 100%	40 100%	102 100%
Generally, I enjoy school**	Disagree	34 55%	9 22%	43 42%
	Agree	25 45%	31 78%	59 58%
	Total	62 100%	40 100%	102 100%
I'd rather have a job than be at school**	Disagree	30 48%	38 95%	68 66%
	Agree	33 52%	2 5%	35 34%
	Total	63 100%	40 100%	103 100%

Respondents were asked: "For each of the following statements about your high school education, please indicate how strongly you agree or disagree?" They answered using a five-point scale, with "1" meaning "strongly disagree," and "5" meaning "strongly agree." Responses of one to three were recoded as "disagree," responses four and five were recoded as "agree."

* Differences significant at the p<0.01 level

** Differences significant at the p<0.001 level

Controlling for location showed that there were no discernible differences between the Edmonton and Bremen sub-samples (Table not shown). This suggests that the streamed

German education system and Canada's composite high school system lead to similar attitudes in respect to the different values between work and education.

Relationship with Teachers

Compounding youth apprentices' negative attitude toward schooling is a persistent undercurrent of resentment against (some) teachers that could contribute to a student's decision to choose RAP as an alternative to the more academic mainstream. We heard earlier from Bonnie, the Edmonton RAP student apprenticing as a hairdresser, when she talked about her parents' suggestion that she may not have the ability to complete the required education for her initial wish to become a massage therapist. Her resentment also extends to her experiences with teachers at high school, where the only teacher who believed in her was her cosmetology teacher (Edmonton RAP Focus Group, October 9, 2002):

> Bonnie: Other teachers just look down on me. They always thought that I was like that stupid girl that couldn't do anything more. So, they're just like [puts on patronizing voice] "oh, it's good that you are taking hairdressing." Last year was really bad, because pretty much a lot of my teachers told me … because I wanted to upgrade to English 30, that's what you need to get into university, and most teachers told me, no, you don't want to do that. And then I did pass with a 51 [proud voice]. And I worked my ass off to get that. You have no clue how hard I worked. I just wanted to prove to them, you sit there, you look down on me, like I'm an idiot. Well, I proved you wrong.
>
> WL: Do you think students who want to go to university have a better relationship with their teachers?
>
> Bonnie: Yeah, because the teacher knows they have to have those sorts of marks to get into the university. So they look at that student, and they look at … let's say a person in mechanics who knows what they're going to be, of course they're going to work. More or less, they look at the student who's going to university, because they don't think the other student is going there. There's that stereotype again. They're stupid, they can't go to university, let's not waste our time.

This impression that teachers selectively encourage students is echoed by German youth apprentices. Before starting his apprenticeship as a car mechanic, Steffen attended *Gymnasium* for one year (i.e., Grade 11), with the intention of gaining his *Abitur* and eventually studying law. But he dropped out at the end of Grade 11 (Bremen Apprentices Focus Group, May 14, 2002):

> WL: I just wanted to ask you again, was it a difficult decision to drop out of the *Gymnasium*, or were you happy about leaving?
> Steffen: I was really happy to leave the *Gymnasium.*
> Thomas: [To Steffen] How many years did you do?
> Steffen: Just one, Grade 11, but if you don't have any interest and you fall asleep in class, than it's no use. I have problems with school anyways. I can follow along and all, but for me, that's not a life.
> WL: How did the teachers react?
> Steffen: They want to get rid of you. In Grade 11, they really want to get rid of you. That's when they separate the wheat from the chaff, the good from the bad.
> WL: There were no teachers who tried to ….?
> Steffen: [interrupts] Yeah, I had a whole bunch of friends, well they're still my friends, and they didn't make it either and eventually left. A whole lot, I think a third from that year has already left.

While youth apprentices talk about relationships with teachers (at least teachers in the core academic subjects) negatively, high school students in the academic mainstream paint a decidedly different picture. Alissa perceives her teachers as caring and supportive of her plans for higher education (Edmonton Academic Focus Group, February 13, 2002):

> Alissa: Yeah, the teachers around here seem to care an awful lot about the students. They … and a lot of teachers have been like forcefully telling us, "no, you're going to that [university] open house, I'm sorry, I don't care, I'm not giving you that [unintelligible]." So, they're really quite concerned about a lot of us. And they're concerned about what we are going to be doing later on. Like I had a lot of teachers like asking what's going to happen with me next year, which is really good, to hear that they care.

This ideal of mutual respect between teacher and student, expressed by a number of the academic-track students, is rather different from how youth apprentices perceive this relationship. We already heard from Rebecca, who complained about her teachers' attitude toward her abilities ("They always thought that I was like that stupid girl that couldn't do anything more [than go into hairdressing]"). The majority of Edmonton youth apprentices suggested that their teachers in the academic core subjects not only had no interest in what they did, but generally did not even know about their involvement with RAP. Of course, this relationship of ignorance and disrespect cuts both ways, as the following comments by Nathan and Riley, both Edmonton apprentices in RAP, show (Edmonton RAP Focus Group, October 22, 2002):

> Nathan: I mean, at school the teachers tell you to do something, and you're saying, "well, what are you going to get me for it." …
>
> …
>
> Riley: I don't know, at school, if teachers say "do this" and you're just like "yeah, whatever." You sit there, OK you may have to see the principal, the principal will be like "blah, blah, blah, you did something bad" you know. … They say you get into trouble, they say [puts on whiny voice] "don't do it again, you're bad," and I'm like "OK, yeah, yeah, whatever."

Comments by RAP students like Nathan and Riley, of course, bring to mind a different view of culturally determined reproduction, namely that of resistance theory as popularized in Paul Willis's (1977) *Learning to Labour*, discussed in Chapter 3.

Resistance

My study can be added to a large number of other Canadian studies (see Davies 1994 for a review of Canadian resistance research) that have found no evidence of the type of rebellious, counter-cultural behaviour described in *Learning to Labour*. However, Willis came much closer to the Canadian reality when he wrote about working-class students' rejection of the theoretical aspects of education:

> The rejection of school work by 'the lads' and the omnipresent feeling that they know better is also paralleled by a massive feeling on the shop floor, and in the working class generally, that practice is more important than theory. … The shop floor abounds with apocryphal stories about the idiocy of purely theoretical knowledge. Practical ability always comes first and is a *condition* of other kinds of knowledge (Willis 1977, 56, emphasis in original).

Much like Willis's lads, the youth apprentices with whom I spoke overwhelmingly embrace the practical, applied knowledge they learn at the workplace and, to various degrees, reject the theoretical, and to them generally useless knowledge associated with academic subjects at school (Edmonton RAP Focus Group, October 22, 2002):

Nathan: School is a lot of theory; well pretty much school is theory. Whereas a job is hands-on; you know, you're not sitting there with a math book, figuring out some paragraph and what the answer is. At work, you're given a problem and you're physically solving it yourself. You're finding out, ok, I tried this, this doesn't work. I tried this, this doesn't work. I tried this, it works. And you don't have to do six more problems, worded a different way, to make sure you know. Once you've gotten it right …
Riley: … you move on …
Nathan: … you move on, because next time you come to it, you've done it physically. It's right there in front of you. It's almost impossible to forget that.

This preference for applied, practical knowledge over theoretical knowledge clearly crosses borders, as this sentiment was frequently echoed by German apprentices (Bremen Apprentices Focus Group, May 14, 2002):

WL: Do you think *Realschule* or *Hauptschule* prepared you properly to make the transition to the working world?
Kai: No, as far as working is concerned, I don't think so.

> Sebastian: A bunch of things we learned then, we don't need at all today.
> Torsten: I don't need any of it today, nothing.

Rather consistently, youth apprentices reject the theoretical nature of school in preference for the hands-on character of work. However, most still recognize some value in certain academic subjects, but only if they can see their potential applicability in the workplace. Thus, certain aspects of mathematics, physics, or chemistry may be acceptable, whereas English and social studies hold very little value for most apprentices (Edmonton RAP Focus Group, October 22, 2002):

> Riley: Physics and math is pretty much all. English, phew, social, phew. You don't have to know the background of an engine. Where it came from, who invented it. It doesn't matter. You have to fix it. Like you're wiring something; [puts on pedantic teacher voice] "this is copper wire that Mr. Charlie Bobb invented in the 1950s; let's write an essay on him." You don't do any of that.
> Nathan: It doesn't matter where the copper wire came from, it doesn't matter who discovered it. It's plain and simple; it's copper wire and you gotta do this with it. And that's the result. It doesn't matter, anything else.

Riley's and Nathan's comments, or the realization of Dean, another Edmonton RAP student apprenticing as a carpenter, that in the five months he has worked as a RAP apprentice he has not needed to use any language or social skills, flies in the face of the employability skills discourse which stresses the importance of so-called transferable (i.e., more academic) skills over specific technical skills. The employability skills discourse generally looks at the education system as the arena in which young people are to become equipped with transferable skills like communication, teamwork, literacy, and numeracy (Krahn, Lowe and Lehmann 2002). But many of the apprentices with whom I spoke see the relationship reversed. Employability skills, or at least discipline and perseverance, are acquired in the workplace and are transferred back to school, at least in theory.

However, not all RAP students share this negative view of high school as impractical and irrelevant for the real world. Ron, who apprentices as a motorcycle mechanic in Edmonton, has a more positive outlook on the importance of a general education, and not just as it relates to the workplace. Unlike most of the other youth apprentices in the sample, Ron acknowledges the value of learning in itself (Edmonton RAP Individual Interview, November 28, 2001):

> Ron … school's always been pretty important to me. Because, where do you go without school? You gonna end up making fries for the rest of your life because you don't have a good high school diploma? And you gotta have good grades to get a post-secondary education, that's at least valuable. … I think everything you learn at school is something you can use in the future. Even if it doesn't relate to your future job or what you want to do, because it's more so the accepting of knowledge and taking it in and learning how to comprehend all that stuff.

Perhaps not surprisingly, Ron is one of the few youth apprentices with a relatively high socio-economic background. His father is university-educated and self-employed. Ron himself talked earlier in the interview about how he is still considering going to university after high school (actually, his father has hopes that he will study business and eventually take over the family company) and how his involvement in RAP as a motorcycle mechanic is mostly the result of his love for motorcycles and the fact that he has been involved in racing them for some time.

Kai is one of the Bremen apprentices who defends education against the more pragmatic attitudes of the other members in a focus group of electrician apprentices. Although he himself graduated from the *Hauptschule*, his father is a university-educated engineer. This may explain Kai's more positive attitude about the value of a general education for an informed citizenry (Bremen Apprentices Focus Group, May 14, 2002):

> WL: What are the most important topics here at the vocational school?
> [general agreement: the technical, occupationally specific classes]
> Kai: And math is maybe the most important, I think. Math is part of all the other classes.
> Markus: Yeah, but what do you need social studies for, or German?
> Kai: [German], so that you can use language, that you know how to write somehow. I think that's gotta be expected, that you can write [the others laugh]. Yeah, I know, there are enough people out there who can't write. Even our age. … Yes, that's general knowledge, you have to … I also think social studies is important. Everybody should know at least a little bit how government works and so on. I think that's just part of what you need to know, also that you can keep up with what's going on. And I think they should actually offer a little more in social studies here, because I think it's dumb if I don't even know who to vote for in the next election. If I had to vote now, who should I vote for, if you have no idea about what's going on.
> Sebastian: They're all bullshitting you anyway.

The key difference from the working-class lads profiled in *Learning to Labour* is that none of the youth apprentices to whom I spoke rejected school outright or provided any evidence of engaging in the type of deviant behaviour described by Willis. Instead, school and what you learn there, while not necessarily seen as important in its own right, is at least recognized as the means to an end, namely to graduate and receive your diploma. Nevertheless, the German youth apprentices, due to their more intense integration into workplaces, are more like Willis's lads in the way they treat and interact with each other. Their interactions in focus groups suggests that the constant teasing, being witty, and "having a laff" appears to be important to their status.

Of course, in the 25 years since Willis's book was published, the economy, labour markets, and education systems have undergone dramatic changes in all Western, industrialized societies. Willis's lads, one must assume, could still rely to some degree on a labour market with a reasonable number of unskilled and low-skilled employment opportunities. But such opportunities have largely vanished in our post-industrial, knowledge-based economy. Arguing from the perspective of changing employment relationships in a post-industrial labour market, Brown (1995) suggests that Bourdieu and others have exaggerated the inevitability of middle-class reproduction and that, despite statistical evidence that children from managerial and professional backgrounds do better, it is not a foregone conclusion. The discourse of "flexible organizations" is said to have important implications for the way cultural capital is deployed in the labour market, as middle-class families can no longer rely on the bureaucratization of education, recruitment, and employment.

I would suggest that Brown may actually have the relationship reversed. He sees a loosening of the relationship between cultural capital, educational structures and curriculum, and occupational attainment due to the changing nature of the post-industrial employment contract. However, I believe that the very developments he credits for devaluing cultural capital are actually increasing its importance in the workplace. Increasingly, the prerequisite for success in a post-industrial labour market is seen in more general education, not more specialized education. An ability to learn, to absorb new ideas, and to work well with others are regularly cited as the most important skills in more flexible, de-bureaucratized organizations. These are skills usually associated with higher levels of education and are thus still intimately tied to cultural capital.

Brown (1995) also talks about truncated organizational careers and the greater risk associated with the post-industrial employment contract. Again, recent statistical evidence (see Statistics Canada 2003; Taillon and Paju 1999) suggests that these trends have actually increased, rather than diminished, the importance of cultural capital. Ever rising levels of education are needed as a safeguard against labour market uncertainty, and the resulting credential inflation increases the value of higher degrees from more prestigious institutions.

My observation that none of the study participants rejected the idea of receiving a high school education, and that nobody had seriously considered dropping out, is obviously related to young people's realization of these relationships. Such a realization reflects a public discourse that demands ever higher levels of education for an even moderately successful vocational biography. The "stay-in-school-or-you-are-screwed-for-the-rest-of-your-life" rhetoric has certainly sunk in with these young people, as the following focus group excerpt attests (Edmonton RAP Focus Group, February 11, 2002):

> WL: Had any of you ever thought of dropping out of high school?
> Doug: I haven't.
> Nick: It's not worth it, really. After you do, then you're screwed for life.

Many students reported anecdotal evidence about what happened to those who actually did drop out. A common theme was that of drug addiction and prostitution as alternatives to high school completion and solid, middle-class careers (Edmonton RAP Focus Group, October 9, 2002):

> Bonnie: My best friend, she's like a complete drug addict, she's slept with guys for things. My other friends, I was in class with them, there's four girls, one stayed a coke addict and selling coke, the other one's—and she didn't graduate from high school, she was like sent away—the other one's, from what I hear, walking the street sometimes. The other one's a complete addict. Like, these are my friends I grew up with, that didn't finish high school. And then there's me, and I don't do any of that stuff.

While youth apprentices favour practical, applied knowledge over abstract, theoretical knowledge, real deviant or rebellious behaviour is perceived as self-destructive. In both countries, youth apprentices, just like their academic counterparts, have accepted the dominant discourse in which educational credentials are the foundation for occupational success.

Summary

Despite young people's overall career confidence, their insistence that their transitions from high school are within their locus of control, and that they acted independently from the influence of others, both the quantitative participant profiles and the interview and focus group transcripts provided ample evidence to the contrary.

While the quantitative data revealed fairly "traditional" class-based patterns of inequality, the more interpretive analysis in this chapter showed that young people's career plans were overwhelmingly characterized by culturally reproductive processes. My interpretation of their stories revealed how cultural capital and habitus were formed, reinforced and altered in the home, in larger social networks, in schools, and in other institutional arrangements. These findings directly address research question 4, which asks how young people's own description of their agency can be interpreted, given the obvious impact of structural elements, and how these findings relate to existing theoretical accounts of structure and agency in school-work transitions.

In keeping with Bourdieu's notion of habitus (1977, 1990), I found that most youth apprentices grew up in a family environment in which "being good with your hands" was considered very important. Many of the males spoke of "tinkering around" with their dads. In contrast, the families of academic-track students were more encouraging of intellectual or artistic skills and generally pushed for high levels of achievement at school. In Germany, this relationship is further exacerbated through early streaming within the education system. Parents play a crucial role in deciding on placement in one of the three secondary school types. Thus, parents' distrust or lack of interest in higher education can effectively preclude their child's participation in it. The survey findings presented in Chapter 5 indeed suggest that Germany's streamed education system and its highly regulated labour market are far more "effective" in reproducing social inequality. Yet, the Bremen participants were much like their Edmonton counterparts in their insistence that individual talent and perseverance are more important to successful school-work transitions than structural factors like class, ethnicity, or gender (see Figure 1 in this chapter).

I have also shown how schools, teachers, and curriculum are intimately implicated in these processes of cultural reproduction. As Bourdieu and Passeron (1977) suggested, lack of cultural capital puts lower-class youth in a position of distinct disadvantage vis-à-vis a middle-class curriculum and school culture. Youth apprentices in both countries overwhelmingly rejected abstract, theoretical learning in favour of more applied knowledge. This alienation from the core focus of high school curriculum finds further expression in their interactions with teachers. While academic-track high school students spoke about the support and encouragement they receive from their teachers, youth apprentices experienced relationships with teachers very differently. In Edmonton, many youth apprentices talked about being either stereotyped as stupid, or just ignored by their teachers. According to RAP students, many academic-subject teachers did not seem to be even aware of their participation in the program. Similarly, some Bremen youth apprentices who had spent some time in the *Gymnasium* told stories of being "cooled out," and of feeling like the chaff that has been separated from the wheat.

However, in contrast to what Willis (1977) and other resistance researchers have argued, such relationships and experiences did not result in youth apprentices' outright rejection of formal education. While being at school and learning were not exactly exciting and interesting, all participants in my study accepted the credential function of education. Difficult labour market conditions and a pervasive public discourse about the need to stay at school meant that nobody in my study discounted the value of graduating from high school and receiving some form of post-secondary credential (of which an apprenticeship ticket is one).

I did, of course, find some evidence of individuals "breaking through the shackles" of their social origin. A number of students in the academic-track sub-groups came from working-class backgrounds. In both cities, I spoke to youth whose socio-economic background should effectively preclude them from participation in higher education. Yet, they (and their parents) were trying to leave the drudgery of a working-class life behind and to achieve upward mobility through higher education.

Rather than conforming to a deterministic interpretation of habitus and cultural capital, the plans of these working-class young people to attend university have more in common with concepts of structured individualization or bounded agency. The working-class students planning on attending university expressed a distinct sense of risk and uncertainty associated with their plans, something that was not evident in those participants whose plans were more in line with their social origin. I also argued that these processes appeared to be contradictory, in that the strong desire of parents that their children be able to enjoy a better life often meant that the young people themselves expressed far less agency in their narratives than did those whose transitions are considered socially reproductive.

This creates a theoretical dilemma. Are we to discount narratives of agency if the result of this agency is socially reproductive? And should we automatically label plans that suggest social mobility as acts of agency? I suggest not. Bourdieu's concept of habitus is much more useful here than his critics allow. Rather than interpreting habitus as an overly-determined view of human agency (Jenkins 1992), I propose the use of habitus not as determining action, but as providing a framework in which social reality can be individually constructed and in which agency actually becomes possible and meaningful. This suggests a concept of agency as habitual that helps to explain how reproductive outcomes can still be infused with individual agency, just as agency is always informed by the agent's habitus. This view of agency as grounded in class habitus is reinforced by my findings that, despite the significant differences in the institutional and cultural environments in which the young people in Edmonton and Bremen embark on school-work transitions, their accounts of agency and the underlying narratives of reproduction were strikingly similar.

However, in order to engage fully in a theoretical reconceptualization of agency as habitual in Chapter 10, I first need to discuss (in Chapter 9) a variety of strategies young people employ to assert agency even within a constraining structural context.

Chapter 9

Biography Reconstruction as Individual Strategy: "There It's the Real World"

The last year of high school is obviously a very important period in school-work transitions, as students begin to seriously consider life after high school, narrow their options, and reinforce dispositions toward specific career destinations, while also preparing for exams and eventually graduation. Edmonton youth apprentices in RAP are in a rather unique situation, compared to their school mates, as they have already embarked on a career path and have thus dealt with a range of choices still ahead for most other students. That they have already ventured into the adult labour market, but also still attend high school, puts them in an interesting position in which they continue to evaluate their initial choice to enter a possible career in the trades. RAP students are confronted with an education system that consistently emphasizes the value of higher, academic education. They interact with family, teachers, and peers who may not always be supportive or understanding of their choice.

The conversations I had with many RAP students brought to light an underlying theme of biography construction, or possibly reconstruction, in which individuals explain and justify their choices and continue to consider alternatives, often as reactions to the responses and attitudes of others. The analysis in this chapter is a continuation of Chapter 8, as both chapters address ways in which individuals' stories of agency can be interpreted given the overwhelming evidence of structurally reproductive forces. While Chapter 8 was concerned with deconstructing individual narratives for evidence of reproduction, this chapter looks at individual strategies that youth apprentices use to reconcile this conflict between structure and agency.

Biography Reconstruction

In previous chapters, I have shown how a set of biographical circumstances (e.g., family and upbringing) interacts with a social context (e.g., school system and curriculum) to create relatively consistent and powerful dispositions toward career and educational plans. Youth with firm commitments to attend university were found to come from families in which parents had higher levels of post-secondary education, or at least stressed the importance of education with their children. The same young people received further encouragement in school systems that favour those entering with higher levels of cultural capital. In contrast, many youth apprentices grew up in an environment rich in manual work traditions and marked by a distrust of or indifference to higher education. While their academic mainstream school mates were encouraged by teachers and counsellors to do well academically and to aim for university or college, most youth apprentices were noticed (mostly by vocational teachers) for their manual talents and felt ignored by teachers in academic subjects. Some of the RAP students had given thought to this *de facto* streaming and to the possibility that their choice to enter RAP may be considered inferior by their fellow students (Edmonton RAP Focus Group, October 22, 2002):

WL: Why do you think not more people take advantage of a program like this?

…

Nathan: I think the reason more people aren't going after this is that they think it's more like a lower-class type job, because it's labour. It is a lot of physical work, and they're thinking that people who are doing that don't have the brains.

WL: Do you get that kind of attitude from people?

Nathan: Hmm, … yeah I do actually. Some people do, they think, ah, you're a tradesperson, you know, you're not that smart. That's why you're doing it.

However, none of the youth apprentices to whom I spoke claimed to care about this perception. Yet, there remains an unspoken sense that their decisions need to be justified more so than those of students who plan on going to university. Luis, a first year RAP student apprenticing as a chef, speaks for most youth apprentices (Edmonton RAP Individual Interview, November 22, 2001):

> WL: Now that you've chosen to apprentice as a chef, you don't get the sense that people look down on you?
>
> Luis: Sometimes they say it's not as … you know, it puts me down one less than them. Like, it's not a really smart job, you're like an idiot, is how they treat …. Some don't treat me, but they … sometimes it seems like that, that I'm less than them.
>
> WL: How do you feel about that?
>
> Luis: It doesn't bother me, like. It did affect me once, but my manager told me, even if you like it, no matter what it is, as long as you like it, forget about everybody else. It doesn't matter what they think. It's what you want. If you like being a garbage man, then be a garbage man. No one's going to stop you. So, you know, it made me think, it doesn't matter what they want to be, I just be what I want to be.

The following conversation with four young women who entered RAP as hairdressing apprentices is characteristic of the ways in which their decision to become hairdressers is both justified and reconsidered (Edmonton RAP Focus Group, February October 9, 2002):

> Bonnie: I want to do a whole bunch of things. I want to get my own business, I want to become a massage therapist and I want to do hair. I want to make some money, OK! [laughs]. Just there's a lot of courses that I still have to do to raise my marks, to be able to go to university to take business. So, right now I just worry about my hairdressing. I do that, see how that goes. If I really still like it and I find that the money is OK, then I'll keep with it. If I find that I want to become something *more*, I might take massage therapy. I know that's a big responsibility, but I like money, so …
>
> WL: You made an interesting comment. You said "if I would like to do something *more*". Did anybody ever tell you that you could do more with your life than hairdressing?

Bonnie: No, everybody's just like, "you don't have high enough marks to do something" …
WL: So people aren't looking down on your choice?
Joelle: They think … we're stereotyped as stupid people …
WL: Does that bother you?
Joelle: It's because we don't go like to university or something like that. So, it's kind of like … well, you're not going to university, so you're not going to make anything out of your life. Or something like along that line. Like, I mean, even from your friends. I know … there's lots of people I know who are going to post-secondary kind of things, and they don't mean to do that, but you still, every once in a while, you kind of … you still kind of get that sense.
WL: Does that hurt you?
Liz: No [emphatically]! Because you know one of these days we are going to turn around and … we don't want to be better than them, but we're going to prove everybody wrong. Like I'm going to go and upgrade my marks and take nursing within two years. Just because I don't do it just out of high school, that doesn't mean I'm not smart enough, or I can't do it and I don't want to do it. Because I want to do it and I will do it.

Youth apprentices often engage in a form of biography reconstruction that reaffirms habitual states and earlier decisions. Decisions are often recast as having been based on already existing interests and on the pleasure and enjoyment the work promised to entail. Work experience gained since starting their apprenticeships is largely described as fulfilling this promise, as having been "fun."

(Edmonton RAP Focus Group, February 11, 2002):
Dean: I've always been fascinated with like watching things get done. Like, you sit there and you watch them pour concrete foundations for your house, and watch them frame it, and you watch them put the plywood on and drywall it. I just love watching getting things done.

(Edmonton RAP Focus Group, October 9, 2002)
Joelle: Oh yeah, this profession [hairdressing] is awesome for stuff like that. It's like not work. When you're having one of those days where you just laugh the whole day, because it's just … It's not like, I'd say, your desk job; it's fun.

Steffen, a Bremen apprentice car mechanic who quit *Gymnasium* after Grade 11 explains why working with cars was a more rewarding option for him at this point, although he says that to become a lawyer remains his life's goal (Bremen Apprentices Focus Group, May 14, 2002):

> WL: Did anybody here [in the focus group] apply to apprentice with one of the big car manufacturers?
> Steffen: Well, I didn't apply, but Mercedes has an assembly plant north of Bremen and they did make me an offer that I could start there. But then, of course, I decided differently.
> WL: Why did you decide not to take that offer?
> Steffen: Because I wanted to know if I can handle [going to *Gymnasium*], if I have what it takes. … At that point, I just wasn't mature enough, I didn't understand the meaning of life. But now I understand it and I'm actually quite happy that I now work in this smaller garage.
> …
> WL; When you first continued at the *Gymnasium*, did you have any other career plans?
> Steffen: Yes, I wanted to go to university.
> WL: In what area?
> Steffen: Law. I still hope to do that. You can still do that later through upgrading [*zweiter Bildungsweg*]. … To be a lawyer is still my ultimate goal.
> …
> WL: Wouldn't it have made more sense then to do an apprenticeship in a more white-collar area?
> Steffen: Yeah, maybe it would have been easier, but then I wouldn't have anything from which I could profit myself, you know … and it's fun. That's just important, and I wouldn't know how to do anything with cars. If I was to apprentice in an administrative job, you sit in an office, and you don't have an office at home. I don't think anybody enjoys sitting at an office desk in their free time, except for maybe playing computer games.

Steffen does not seem concerned about the contradictions in his story. Specifically his ultimate goal of becoming a lawyer needs exactly that type of educational credential for which he seems to have such little patience.

Despite these efforts to reconstruct biographies and to recast former dispositions and choices, for some youth apprentices there remains a lingering doubt about their decision and about the potential it may hold for their future. Julia, a young Bremen hairdressing apprentice who, like Steffen, quit *Gymnasium* after Grade 11 is a perfect example of a biography reconstruction that begins to collapse on itself during the course of the focus group (Bremen Apprentices Focus Group, May 7, 2002):

> Julia: I was just happy … in the beginning, I would say that I'm happy that I now have a job that I know I want to do, that I enjoy. I said to myself, I don't care how much money I make. OK, by now you start thinking, the older I get the more plans I have, like moving out, a car, driver's licence. And you start thinking, yeah, I'll be able to afford only one of them. Either a car or an apartment, or holiday or clothes. You can always only afford one of them, you really have to figure out what you want. I guess that's kind of stupid. But I'm happy that the job is fun, and then I'd rather earn a little less money than making the big dough and sitting in an office all day, waiting for five o'clock.

A little later in the focus group, the very advantages she talks about above (a job that is fun rather than making money) have become disadvantages (Bremen Apprentices Focus Group, May 7, 2002):

> Julia: … I can't imagine standing behind a chair for 15 years, washing hair, blow-drying hair, cutting hair, always the same. It's the same all the time. I mean even now it's like "oh no, not another perm." You always think it's totally varied … and it is, because you also do hair extensions and whatever, there are always new things to do. But what I wanted to say … I don't know … always the same. … And the money is terrible.

When I suggest that her school credentials could have opened up other opportunities, Julia and others in the group at once construct and deconstruct their choice to become hairdressers (Bremen Apprentices Focus Group, May 7, 2002):

> WL: You do have the *Realschule* diploma and even went to the *Gymnasium* for some time, which opens up a whole range of opportunities, for

example in administrative or other white-collar apprenticeships. Why, in the end, did you decide to go into hairdressing?

Julia: That was too boring for me, working in an office. I really didn't want to do that, although at one point I was pretty sure that I would end up in an office. I also wanted to become a teacher, totally conservative jobs, somehow. But then I just said to myself, no, I muck around on myself all the time, doing my nails, makeup, that totally interests me. Every weekend, disco and all, "hey, can you quickly fix my hair." I've always somehow liked doing that. Then I said to myself, working in an office, that's too boring for me, I need to meet people and not stare at a computer screen all day long.

Anne: You know, now I wouldn't mind staring at a computer screen [laughs].

Julia: Sometimes I think that, too. I wish I hadn't done this, all the stress.

Anne: I think I will definitely still do something like that. Something that totally interests me, like we're learning communication and psychology here [at vocational school].

Julia: Yeah, somehow I do feel … not stupid, but kind of stuck. You're not challenged, and I miss that, challenging my head. You're physically exhausted, total creativity and all, great … but educational, no, it's just not enough.

Connie: Somehow I've just had it with school, all the sitting around and blah, blah, blah. But I also don't want to stay stupid. Not being challenged enough, this feeling ….

Adding to Julia's own sense of insecurity about her choice is the general disapproval from people around her. Her parents ("Really, they were rather against it, because they know how I did at school … they said 'you can do better'"), her younger brother ("and my brother, he kept laying into me [with outraged voice] 'you can't become a hairdresser; youuuu! Have you gone nuts, or what?'"), and her friends all think that she could have done much better.

Julia's dilemma raises a number of important questions regarding agency. Given her parents' moderate levels of educational and occupational attainment, was her decision to drop out of *Gymnasium* to become a hairdresser one in which social status reasserts itself over agency? Bourdieu himself used the concept of *hysteresis of habitus* (Bourdieu 1990) to define a situation in which an option is available to an individual, but due to his or her habitus, this option is rejected. However, we do know that Julia did well enough at school, and that her parents, her brother, most of her friends, and her teachers reacted with varying degrees of horror to her decision to leave school to become a hairdresser. In other words, most of what I earlier discussed as habitus-reinforcing contexts (e.g., home, larger social environment, and schools) actually led to what we might call habitus modification. Yet, Julia's accounts of always having been interested in "mucking around" with her hair, nails, and makeup suggest some form of agency that is habitual. Although I subscribe to the notion of habitus as a durable yet open system of dispositions, Julia's story also shows how, for most individuals, "experiences will confirm habitus, because most people are statistically bound to encounter circumstances that originally fashioned their habitus" (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992, 133). Julia tells how her dad himself had dropped out of school and how this somehow justifies leaving school and going into hairdressing (Bremen Apprentices Focus Group, May 7, 2002):

> Julia: Yeah, my dad dropped out, …, he himself had just had it with school. He himself lived his life like that. In a way, I want to start my life like he did …

While the possibility of doing "something bigger," or of attending university in the future, remains important to some youth apprentices, most also reject the idea that higher post-secondary education is required for future career potential. Joelle, one of a group of Edmonton RAP hairdressers, explains (Edmonton RAP Focus Group, October 9, 2002):

> WL: Do you think that not going to university is a disadvantage in the long run? Do you think you really have to go eventually, to make the best out of your life?
>
> [some tentative Yeahs in the background]

Joelle: I don't really think so, because I think it's like up to you, what you put into things. If you put all your effort into something, it doesn't matter. Because … I don't know, like if you're not really into like the books and if you're not really into that place of going into university, you shouldn't really do it, because you're only doing it because it's like a stereotype. That it's something you should do after high school. You should just do whatever is motivating yourself, because you're just going to find yourself more successful at that.

Sven, a German youth in his second year of a hairdressing apprenticeship, would agree with Joelle about personal motivation and drive being more important than formal educational credentials. He gives his boss as an example (Bremen Apprentices Focus Group, May 7, 2002):

Sven: My boss doesn't even have *Hauptschule*, he quit *Hauptschule*, and as a hairdresser, he's now the trendsetter in Germany. He's on TV and stuff like that. I don't know, but if I look at him, I see … I mean, I don't like him personally, but as a boss he's my role model. Because I know what he can do. And without even graduating from *Hauptschule*, he became a famous man. And that's why I think somehow that you don't need school anymore these days.

Rejecting schooling and denying value to higher post-secondary education is also a reflection of some RAP students' desire to "get on with their life" (Edmonton RAP Individual Interview, November 22, 2001):

WL: Did school become any more meaningful through RAP for you?
Brent: Eh, not really. I think life in general became more meaningful. I just got the overview of what life is gonna be, you know, I really wanna get out of [school] and just start my life, start a career, get going.

Instead of being at school, work creates meaning in many RAP students' lives. They prefer to be at work because "it's fun" and because they begin to develop a social life with their usually older co-workers. This represents another important step in their journey to adulthood (Edmonton RAP Individual Interview, November 23, 2001):

WL: [Between school and work], where do you like to spend your time more? Where do you have more fun?

Debbie: To tell you the truth, at work. I love being at work. 'Cause a lot of people say: "why do you like being at work." 'Cause they tell me that … when you ask "how is work," people are like "yeah, it is boring, it isn't great." With me, when they ask me, I love it; it's great. And they usually don't hear that. And I actually like going to work, I don't mind it at all [with emphasis].

However, some cracks do appear in these narratives, particularly for the German apprentices who have in recent years seen traditional career patterns for skilled workers from the dual system erode as employers increasingly hire university graduates into mid-level supervisory positions. While this problem is not recognized by all, some like Kai, who apprentices as an electrician in Bremen, are aware of the greater range of opportunities open to those with higher levels of education (Bremen Apprentices Focus Group, May 14, 2002):

WL: If you do look at your friends who are still at school, do you envy them?

Kai: A bit. But then again, we already make money and are … [is interrupted]

Karl: … [unintelligible] they're always on holidays.

Kai: Yeah, of course that sucks. But then again, I can say I'm young, I'll have my trades ticket by the time I'm 20, hopefully, and they don't. They won't have achieved anything real in their lives, somehow. I can say, I got something in my hands. I can go off and do something.

Markus: Those who are still at school doing their *Abitur* sometimes make more money in their part-time jobs than I do as an apprentice [laughs].

Karl: Yeah, I agree. My friend, he only works 8 hours a week and makes 250 Euro a month.

Kai: Yes, but look at it this way, when they're done with school and they start an apprenticeship, then they'll realize "oh, now we make less money than when we went to school." And then we're at a point that we can say, yes, we are making real money now.

Karl: OK, but when they're done, they'll make a lot more than we ever will.

Kai: Yeah, but then you'll have to go to school if you want to make more money. But you didn't. I mean, here you are, sitting here with us. Was your own decision, wasn't it?

The various forms of biography construction and reconstruction discussed above suggest that most youth apprentices are conscious of the potential disadvantage their educational and occupational attainment poses for their life course. Although the advantages of higher education are generally denied, there is still an undercurrent of doubt. The German youth apprentices with lower levels of secondary education, whose future access to higher education is much more limited because of Germany's heavily streamed education system, particularly express concerns about the long-term disadvantages they face vis-à-vis those with a *Gymnasium* or university education.

A Note on Gender and Biography Reconstruction

In Chapter 8, I analyzed responses to survey questions (Appendix F, Question 22) asking about factors affecting the achievement of career goals (see Figure 1). When I looked for gender differences, I found that the young men and women in my study rated the importance of structural factors like family background and ethnicity, or agency factors such as "having the right attitude" and "being flexible" quite similarly (Table not shown). However, I also found that, compared to both the Edmonton women and the Bremen men in my study, the women in Bremen were less likely to rate gender as an important factor affecting the achievement of career goals (17 percent of Bremen men and 15 percent of Edmonton women rated gender as an important factor, compared to only 4 percent of Bremen women). This finding seems puzzling, considering that in Chapter 6, I showed how the young women in Bremen were more concerned with balancing the double responsibilities of having a career and a family, compared to their female counterparts in Edmonton. These survey findings now suggest that the German women do not recognize that these very concerns might be a factor in their ability to fulfill their career ambitions.[37] The following excerpt from a focus group with female *Gymnasium* students in Bremen shows the same lack of awareness of gendered opportunities (Bremen Academic Focus Group, May 24, 2002):

> WL: [Are you] concerned that being a woman could hold you back?
> Silke: Not anymore, I don't think.
> Theresa: ... For example, the daughter of my mother's boss, she was the only woman in her year studying mechanical engineering and physics, and she makes a shitload of money. ... She pushed through. She did have to deal with sexism, dumb jokes, and stuff. But she just said, what the heck.
> Farida: It depends on the person.
> Theresa: Yes, it depends on your character. A woman with a weak character wouldn't choose something like that.
> Simone: Yeah, she'd rather be a secretary.
> Farida: And if you're lucky [unintelligible] … with equal opportunity, you may actually be better off than men. You might actually have an advantage.

Just as the (male and female) youth apprentices actively reconstructed their choice to enter a career in the trades as providing advantages over attending higher education, the young women in this focus group reinterpret their potential structural disadvantage as either an actual advantage (via the mechanisms of equal opportunity) or as an issue of personal commitment and ability.

7

Embrace of Workplace Culture

The previous section showed that, not surprisingly, academic-track high school students in both countries were much more confident and assured of the advantages of their post-secondary plans. While academic-track high school students from lower socio-economic backgrounds had to deal with issues of greater risk and uncertainty, the advantage of going to university was still never in doubt. The biography construction and reconstruction we have seen among youth apprentices is largely absent among academic-track youth, in both countries. It is also not important to them at this point in their life course to begin asserting independent adult identities. For youth apprentices, however, this is a crucial strategy in their biography construction.

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[37] Given the relatively small sample sizes, this finding may not constitute a generalizable cross-national difference, but certainly warrants further investigation.

Although I earlier rejected the notion that participation in youth apprenticeship is an act of resistance against the dominant, middle-class culture of educational mobility, my findings do match with those of Willis's (and other resistance research) in two ways. First, as discussed earlier, youth apprentices clearly prefer applied over theoretical learning. Mainstream education is accepted for its credential function, but academic subjects are of little intrinsic interest. Second, and this is the focus of this section, youth apprentices clearly accept, almost embrace, the workplace culture as an antidote to their experiences at school, or the prospect of white-collar employment (Edmonton RAP Focus Group, February 11, 2002):

> Ted: The one thing about college is, when you're in there, you're in classroom learning. But with the RAP program, you're in hands-on learning. That's the way I gotta go. I gotta go hands-on.
>
> ...
>
> Nick: I don't really want to do an office job, because I'd rather be out actually doing work.
>
> WL: Real physical work?
>
> Nick: Yeah.
>
> Dean: Yeah, the physical in the work appealed to me too, instead of sitting at a desk for six hours.
>
> Doug: Yeah, that would be so boring.

Where school is often seen as meaningless and inconsequential, work is imbued with meaning. Unlike the "unreal world" of high school, RAP students, in their own words, have now entered the "real world" (Edmonton RAP Focus Group, February 11, 2002):

> Ted: You gotta be committed to do it [RAP]. If you're not committed, you won't last. You gotta be committed to do it.
> Dean: And you can't just work two days a week and not the other three. You have to do it consistently all day. Just … yeah.
> Ted: It's not like school. You can't slack off every … [is interrupted]
> Dean: … yeah, it's not like you can come in and not write a single thing down in school. Like if you go into work and don't touch a single tool, there's not … you're not … no questions asked, there's no leniency. Like that, like we have it here. We have it easy here. There it's the real world ...

Interestingly, the discipline and regimen so readily accepted at work was resisted in school (Bremen Apprentices Focus Group, May 30, 2002):

> Frank: School, you had more holidays than school; and getting up in the morning, you wouldn't take that too seriously either. And now at work, it's tough as nails, you couldn't just say, OK, I'm five minutes late. Everything is getting more strict, and school was much too lenient for that.

Almost all of the apprentices I interviewed considered working, drawing a regular salary, and taking on adult responsibilities as conferring a status in the "real world." This status transcends possible disadvantages of social origin (Edmonton RAP Focus Group, February 11, 2002):

> WL: I want to pick up on a point Nick just made, that those people who go to university, most likely their parents will pick up the tab for them. Do you think that gives them an unfair advantage, that they come from maybe better-off families?
> Nick: Not really, because they don't have the skills in the real world. That they haven't paid for everything themselves … [Ted talks over Nick]
> Ted: They don't know the responsibility …
> Nick: … it's gonna be new as soon as they start [working].

A socio-economic disadvantage is thus turned into a "real world" advantage: becoming independent, learning responsibility, and having a plan for your future. Bonnie and Liz, both apprenticing as hairdressers, echo Nick and Ted's comments when they suggest that they are already on a solid career path at a very young age, while their more privileged classmates will continue in a sort of limbo for another five to ten years before they will reach the same point in their life course (Edmonton RAP Focus Group, October 9, 2002):

> WL: Do you think your lifestyle has changed quite a bit, compared to your friends that are just at school?
>
> Bonnie: Oh yeah. We knew what we wanted to be. They didn't. They're going to university and are taking all these course. They have no clue what they want to do. And in Grade 10, I knew what I wanted to be. There were how many people that knew what they wanted to be in Grade 10? So, … I felt kind of, not superior, but I felt like I was doing something better with my life, because I already knew, I was already working at it at such a young age. That's about it.
>
> WL: What do you think makes you different from your friends?
>
> Liz: We have a life career, we can hold on to this, we can always make money. … We're only 18 or 19 years old, and we got a career for us, for ourselves already, that we can use for the rest of our lives. And these other people, they're 25, 30 before they actually know what they want to do.

What emerges from these youth apprentices' interpretation of their role as full-time labour force participants is a sense that they have reached a level of adulthood and maturity that separates them from their peers who are still at school. This sense of maturity and superiority is yet another interpretive strategy youth apprentices employ to validate their career choices in the face of a powerful public discourse advocating high levels of educational attainment.

Accelerated Maturity

It has been argued that young people's coming of age is being delayed in advanced industrial societies (e.g., Coté and Allahar 1994). Young people remain dependent longer on their parents and become economically marginalized through their exclusion from the productive sphere, while, ironically, being increasingly targeted as consumers. Coté (2000) writes about arrested adulthood, suggesting that today's young adults are becoming more like adolescents in their tastes, attire, and general outlook on life and responsibility. However, youth apprentices consider themselves to be much more mature than their academic school mates. Almost all saw this accelerated transition into adulthood as one of the key advantages of participation in RAP in Edmonton or the dual system in Bremen. Rather than shying away from adult responsibility, as Coté's arrested adulthood concept suggests, the youth apprentices in my study were eager to take on the increased responsibility of this new stage in their life course (Bremen Apprentices Focus Group, May 30, 2002):

> Uwe: This thing about responsibility, that's true. You realize that you are growing up, because before, your parents would always tell you "study, because when you start working, you'll be wishing you could be at school." Now we can say, no, or yes, you were right. Now we know for ourselves.

Youth apprentices recognize and appreciate that they are no longer economically dependent, as Ted, an Edmonton welding apprentice, suggests (Edmonton RAP Focus Group, February 11, 2002):

> Ted: The way I look at it, most people are gonna rely on mom and dad for the first four or five years in their life [after high school]. … But I don't want to be like that. I don't want to have to rely on anybody. I want to go and make it on my own.

Brent apprentices as a cook and earlier in the interview commented that, although he had never been interested in going to university (his goal was always to become a chef), his parents could not afford to send him to university. Here is what he has to say about friends who look to their parents for financial support during their post-secondary education (Edmonton RAP Individual Interview, November 22, 2001):

> Brent: .... Like most of my friends [puts on whiny voice], "Oh, my parents pay for university." I find that pointless. I mean, what does that teach you in life? You should be out working in your high school and save up for university, because then you learn how to save and you learn responsibility. So, when you go to [university], you're not an idiot. Some people, it just makes me sad to see that. 'Cause I like responsibility, it looks for you.

For youth apprentices, this new-found sense of maturity is a departure from their former life as high school students and casual workers. It also serves as a reminder that they are now different from academic high school students who "only" go to school. Here is Brent again, the Edmonton RAP student apprenticing as a chef, describing how his experience with RAP has readied him for "the rush into the real world," unlike most of his friends at school who still act like "really big goofs" or at least operate at a lower "maturity level" (Edmonton RAP Individual Interview, November 22, 2001):

> WL: Do you think your outlook on life is different from being with older people at work? Do you see things different than your friends in high school that haven't had this experience?
>
> Brent: Oh for sure. … Like most of my friends [unintelligible], 'cause a lot of them don't understand how the world is going to treat them when they're done. You know, they don't know what to expect, what it's going to be like. I'm bracing myself now for the rush into the real world.
>
> WL: But do you find that sort of being more mature or feeling more mature has changed how you interact with friends at high school?
>
> Brent: Of course, 'cause a lot of times, they say something stupid, but now that you have the maturity level, you really don't find that funny. And you know, sometimes you can't really … I don't know .. get really …. relate

> to them as much as you'd like to, because your thinking level is a little bit higher than theirs.

Similar sentiments are expressed by a group of apprentice car mechanics in Bremen, who argue that they have accepted adult responsibilities and matured by internalizing the discipline of the workplace. In contrast, their (sometimes former) friends at school are still childishly preoccupied with "playing" (Bremen Apprentices Focus Group, May 14, 2002):

> WL: If you think back at what it was like at school, do you prefer working with older people now?
> Detlef: Much better. There is a calmness there.
> Steffen: You're just being treated better. Especially if you show that you can work, than you'll be looked at as an adult and you'll be treated much better; compared to being at school with people my age, who still think about playing.
> WL: Did you notice that you had to grow up a lot faster once you started regular work?
> Thomas: Absolutely. You can't goof around at work and fuck up. You have to get your work done.

For the male youth apprentices, an underlying machismo is often part of this new-found responsibility and maturity. Consider the following comments by Curtis, who apprentices as an automotive technician in Edmonton (Edmonton RAP Individual Interview, November 28, 2001):

> Curtis: ...some kids when they go to school, they don't know what their parents experience when they go to work. For me, second semester, I'm already working as a *man*, doing a *man's* job. I already know what it's like. Not like some kids who don't have a clue of what they have to do. (my emphasis)

A further expression of apprentices' new-found maturity is a change in their leisure behaviour and leisure companions, as Dean, a welding apprentice in RAP suggests (Edmonton RAP Focus Group, February 11, 2002):

WL: Have you changed in terms of what you do in your free time and who you do it with?
Dean: Yeah. I found I hang around mostly with people that are done school and that are working … more people that I can relate with.
WL: So you spend more time with people from work?
Dean: Well not necessarily from work, but people who graduated two years ago or something like, ones that are just getting into the workforce. I find the people at school, they don't … they just don't understand you the same way. They are not thinking on the same level as somebody who's obviously out in the workforce and doing the same thing you are. You're gonna get on better.

Luis, who apprentices as a chef, is even more explicit in his explanation of why he has changed his leisure behaviour and now spends more time with people from work, rather than school (Edmonton RAP Individual Interview, November 22, 2001):

WL: Does that mean you feel more comfortable with your friends from work?
Luis: From work. Because then they talk about things like chemistry and I don't even understand anything involved. Maybe some formulas and stuff. But like stuff that really doesn't matter.
WL: Your friends from school?
Luis: Yes. So, it's like, why do I need to know this.
WL: When you hang out with your friends from work, what kind of stuff do you do?
Luis: We usually go to the movies, or hang around talking. And we end up talking about music, sports, things that happen on the news. You know, stuff like that.
…
WL: Do you think that you lost some friends because you're an apprentice?
Luis: Yeah, I lost some because I don't talk to them anymore.
WL: Do you think that's a problem for you?
Luis: It's not a problem for me at all. 'Cause they seem to change and so do I. And our views and what we see.

However, this new-found maturity and adult-like behaviour can only go so far. It is also important to retain a sense of mischievous youthfulness (Edmonton RAP Focus Group, February 11, 2002):

> WL: Do you think you've become more mature?
> Dean: I think so.
> Ted: You have to be at work and stuff.
> WL: How about your personal life?
> Dean: Yeah, I think my personal life's become more mature …[Ted talks over Dean]
> Ted: Not really. I'm still living my life young.
> Dean: Oh yeah, I'm still young in living my life … young and stupid. But I think I've matured quite a bit.

Fortunately, combining maturity and youthfulness is not too much of a problem, as colleagues at work still like to do "stupid stuff" (Edmonton RAP Individual Interview, November 28, 2001):

> WL: You said earlier that you feel a little more focused and motivated now that you're decided to go into RAP. Do you think that it will make you more grown up …?
> Brad: I think so.
> WL: Have you found that already?
> Brad: Not really. I still like to joke around and do stupid stuff. … [Colleagues at work are] older and the kind of stuff they do is more fun that what we do [at school]. … Because, all the stuff they do is pretty stupid. And I'm thinking, oh, that's probably stuff me and my friends would do. So, I can kind of relate to them.

Others see in the relationship with their colleagues a reminder of their still inferior status as a high school student, rather than a fully-accepted adult. Scott, who apprentices as an electrician and is the youngest person at his worksite considers himself a bit of an outsider in his workplace (Edmonton RAP Individual Interview, November 27, 2001):

> WL: Are you the youngest person?
> Scott: Yeah, I am the youngest person there.
> WL: How is that?

Scott: Oh, it can be hard sometimes.
WL: In what way?
Scott: In like … the guys go to the bar after work, or like the way people talk to you at the worksite, like you're younger and they don't expect you do know as much. You're like "downsized."

While Scott felt he was not taken seriously and being constantly reminded of his relatively inferior status at work, or in his words "downsized," other apprentices are still not sure what to make of their new status as workers and adults. Note how Matt, an Edmonton apprentice chef, first mentions that his managers are not very nice and that this has caused him some difficulty when he started his apprenticeship. Yet, only seconds later, he says that his managers treat him more like an adult (compared to teachers at school) and that the freedom and trust they give him is probably a good thing (Edmonton RAP Individual Interview, November 28, 2001):

WL: Was there anything, when you started work, that you found difficult to get used to?
Matt: Hmm, some of the managers, yeah. Some of them aren't very nice.
WL: So, you are being treated quite differently than you are at school by your teachers?
Matt: Ah, yeah.
WL: Can you talk about that a little more?
Matt: Mm, my managers treat me more like an adult than like my teachers do.
WL: Is that a good thing or a bad thing?
Matt: Uh, … that's good I guess.
WL: How is that different?
Matt: Mm, I don't know. They give me more freedom and stuff at work, yeah.
WL: Do they expect more from you?
Matt: Yeah, but they also have more trust in me.
WL: Is that stressful?
Matt: Sometimes, yeah.
WL: How do you deal with that?
Matt: I don't know, just do what they tell me to do.

This sense of confusion should probably be expected in a situation where high school students continue to spend some of their time at school and the remainder in an adult workplace. As I will argue later, programs like RAP lack a mechanism to assist students to reflect on, discuss, and deal with these changes. Yet, even with such mechanisms in place, as is the case in Germany, the hierarchy of workplaces and mistrust of older workers can prove to be difficult challenges for new apprentices, as the following conversation between a group of Bremen apprentice electricians demonstrates (Bremen Apprentices Focus Group, May 14, 2002):

> WL: At work, were you treated like adults right from the start?
> [people talk over each other, some agreement]
> Sebastian: It depends, I think, on the journeymen that work there.
> Kai: With some, no. You might take [a tool] in your hand, others would be totally OK with that, but he will take it right away from you and will tell you "no, not you!" But with others, you can even work with high voltage, or whatever.
> Markus: Older journeymen always treat you more like a kid, I'd say.
> Kai: Yeah, they'll make you follow them around [laughs].
> Markus: That's right. But the younger ones, they treat you more like an equal. They clean up their own shit, and I'll clean up my shit, and that's it.
> Sebastian: Yeah, they'll let you work properly.
> WL: Generally, how is the relationship with your co-workers?
> [everybody says it is good, no complaints]
> Kai: Well, there's always somebody in there you don't like, but …
> Karl: Well, I don't like my boss.
> Sebastian: Who likes his boss anyways? [laughs]
> Karl: There are always people who are looking for stuff, you know, so they can get you.
> Sebastian: Yeah really, mean little fucks.

So far, my discussion of youth apprentices' sense of maturity has been restricted to their new roles as producers, as active members of the adult workforce, and their general perception of achieving adult status through their relationships with older colleagues at work. However, some youth apprentices have also begun to think about their future life course plans and about everyday responsibilities of adult life. Brent, the Edmonton RAP student apprenticing as a chef, comments on some of the worries he deals with, but which are still foreign to his high school friends (Edmonton RAP Individual Interview, November 22, 2001):

> Brent: [Some of my friends] don't have the real view on … how much it's going to cost them to live on their own, how much a vehicle is, insurance, marriage, you know. They're not even thinking about any of that. To me that's wrong. You should plan this a little … not fully, you don't want to plan your wedding this day, this year. Just, you know, have a guideline for yourselves, so you know what's going on.

Keith apprentices as an electrician through RAP and is one of the youngest participants in my study. Still, his early involvement with RAP has him thinking about his future with decidedly adult concerns about pensions and financial security (Edmonton RAP Individual Interview, November 27, 2001):

> Keith: If you're an early journeyman, you got all your life ahead of you, you'll have a steady paycheque, if you can keep this job, because I've kept it for a long time now, they haven't fired me. And they said that's the kind of job you can keep for a long time, and I'm working with guys that have worked with the company for over 40 years. So, I can start up an RRSP, I have dental, I have … I'll be protected.

Interestingly, but hardly surprising, some of the older German apprentices, who have already made the leap from living at home to having their own household, express a more resigned attitude about the responsibility that has come with this transition. The following conversation between Bulcin and Sven, both apprentice hairdressers in Bremen, is a typical example (Bremen Apprentices Focus Group, May 7, 2002):

> Bulcin: For example, I live on my own and I have to work. … In some way, I have to make money. If somebody lives at home, it's easier to say "oh fuck it, I'll quit my apprenticeship, I live at home, who cares." Not everybody, but I've heard from some people who say "I'll quit my apprenticeship, because I live at home." … I can't do that.
>
> Sven: Yeah, we can't do that anymore, we have an apartment. I have a son at home, he needs diapers, he needs his food … he needs everything, clothes, always new stuff, because he grows all the time. But it's not so

> bad anymore, you actually start looking forward to work. I mean, sometimes I think, going to work tomorrow, that's cool. I think, once the first year of your apprenticeship is behind you, you've changed, you've become an adult. You've learned to not always rebel against everything.

These findings show that accelerated maturity is a real phenomenon for the youth apprentices in my study. They viewed this accelerated transition into adulthood as providing a key advantage over those who enter the labour market with higher post-secondary credentials, but older. Still, I consider this an *ex post facto* strategy of biography reconstruction, as it appears that youth apprentices have to spend at least some time in the workplace in order to realize and articulate this advantage.

However, there is a debate in the psychological literature about whether working is an important and necessary step in the transition to adult status (Mortimer, Shanahan and Ryu 1994; Vondracek 1994) or whether teenagers should be working (Greenberger & Steinberg 1986). Advocates of youth employment argue that gaining maturity involves the ability to perform typical adult roles, such as being employed. Critics suggest that "a superficial ability to play adult roles can be achieved without commensurate development of self understanding or clarification of social experience," a state which may be better described as *pseudomaturity* (Greenberger & Steinberg 1986, 5). Citing the work of Erikson (1968), Greenberger and Steinberg (1986, 7) suggest that early, extensive commitment to a job "may actually interfere with the work of growing up." They argue that in a more individualized society, in which an active and reflexive engagement with one's environment becomes increasingly important, and in which traditional structural barriers are said to break down, young people need a longer period of time for identity clarification, and that early involvement in the workplace circumscribes this process drastically. The result of early extensive involvement in work is what the authors call *adultoid behaviour*:

> "Adultoid" behaviour simply mimics adult activity without being accompanied by the underlying perceptions, beliefs, or understandings that a person who is psychologically adult would bring to a similar situation (ibid., 174).

This raises an absolutely fundamental and complex challenge to youth apprentices' perception of maturity and responsibility, namely, that this very maturity has been gained as the result of an earlier decision that occurred when they were lacking the maturity to make a fully-informed choice. Of course, this brings me back to my original questions regarding the relationship between structural and institutional contexts and individual agency. With the insights gained from both the quantitative and qualitative data described in this and the previous chapters, I will conclude in Chapter 10 a theoretical discussion of how we can understand and conceptualize the complex interrelationship between structure and agency in the transitions from secondary education.

Summary

Despite strong empirical evidence that participation in youth apprenticeships, and subsequently in manual labour careers, is the result of reproductive social processes, a surface reading of my interview and focus group data would lead to a different conclusion. Decisions to enter a trade were described as voluntary and based on interest and long-term career potential, and the work itself was described as exciting, meaningful, and fulfilling. However, the deconstruction of narratives in Chapter 8 provided further insight into culturally reproductive processes (e.g., at the family level through habitus, and at the school level through habitus and cultural capital). This chapter analyzed youth apprentices' narrative strategies, the ways in which they actively construct meaning for their future life course in light of a realization that their decision to enter a trade might have put them at a disadvantage.

The Canada-Germany comparison did not reveal discernible differences, although youth apprentices in both countries are confronted with contradictory developments. Edmonton youth apprentices, as I have shown in Chapters 6 and 7, are poised to move into a highly favourable labour market, characterized by both a construction boom and massive retirements of older skilled workers. Yet, the narratives of Edmonton youth apprentices analyzed in this chapter also show some lingering concerns about their decision. This is, no doubt, related to a public discourse that clearly favours academic over applied vocational education, and professional careers over manual careers. This discourse is particularly pervasive in high schools. I have shown how many of the Edmonton youth apprentices were faced with either indifference (for instance, teachers who had no idea about students' participation in RAP) or sometimes disapproval (for instance, from friends). Clearly, at least at some level, youth apprentices are aware of this discourse and of the potential life course disadvantages their choice might create.

In contrast, the Bremen youth apprentices are part of a system that has a long tradition of valuing careers in the trades. Youth apprenticeships are still the post-high school destination for the majority of young Germans, and graduation from the system used to offer stable, well-paying and highly regarded employment. In other words, youth apprentices in Germany should be less likely to feel the need to justify and reconstruct their decisions to become apprentices. However, a current recession has led to a drop in construction activity in most parts of Germany (including Bremen). Furthermore, the values of manual work and of the dual system (compared to white-collar work and higher post-secondary education) in a post-industrial economy are being increasingly questioned, even in Germany (Geißler 1991; Heidenreich 1998). My findings suggest that both these developments have affected the confidence of Bremen youth apprentices in the long-term career potential of their choice.

Nevertheless, both Edmonton and Bremen youth apprentices reconstruct their choice to enter a trade as actually creating an advantage, rather than a disadvantage. The advantages of entering an apprenticeship are seen as twofold: 1) the work they do is considered fun and interesting; and 2) they get a head start into a career and adult life. This need to justify and reconstruct the decision to become an apprentice is more prominent for those who "could have done better." A perfect example was Julia, the Bremen apprentice, who was on her way to obtaining her *Abitur* when she dropped out of the *Gymnasium* to become a hairdresser. Her decision was greeted with opposition from parents, siblings, and friends, which made it very important for her to highlight the creativity and fun her work allows, compared to the boredom of an office job or school.

Heinz et al. (1987) argue that young people do not passively receive the events and conditions they experience on their way into the labour market, but interpret these experiences within a socially conditioned framework (*gesellschaftliche Deutungsmuster*). In other words, as they move from dream jobs to real occupations, young people explain their choices by referring to socially accepted norms and ideas about work in general, and their chosen occupations in particular. Former dream jobs might be discarded as unrealistic. Actual choices are defended as both ideal within the restrictions placed on them by labour market conditions and their educational attainment, and as work they really enjoy and in reality had wanted for a long time (ibid., 231-232). This strategy of reinterpretation and construction also extends to issues of gender. It seemed particularly important for the young women in Bremen to balance their own concerns about consolidating career and family in an essentially male breadwinner welfare regime with narratives of potential advantages (e.g., through equal opportunity legislation) and success through personal commitment, attitude, and ability.

A second strategy I identified in my sub-sample of youth apprentices was that of immersing oneself into the culture and ideology of the workplace. While the first strategy tried to reconstruct the actual work as exciting and as creating meaning, adopting the culture and ideology of the workplace was a way of defining a new role as worker. Particularly important here was the understanding that, since starting their apprenticeships, young people had entered the "real world," in contrast to the "not real world" of high school (and non-manual work). In highly uncritical terms, the discipline and exploitation that characterize the working conditions of first-year apprentices were celebrated as opportunities to prove oneself in this new role as a productive member of the workforce. Similarly, workplaces were seen as sites in which actions actually have meaning and, even more importantly, consequences.

This new-found identity as an adult worker whose actions carry immediate consequences is closely related to what I called accelerated maturity. The responsibilities apprentices now carry at work, and the consequences they face if they make mistakes, are a huge contrast to the inconsequential, childish environment at school. Youth apprentices see this accelerated maturity in their increased financial independence (although nearly all youth apprentices still lived at home, which is a necessity, given the relatively low income during their apprenticeships) and in their, for lack of a better term, "emotional" growth. Youth apprentices feel that they have become calmer and are more in control of their lives. Through the responsibilities they have been given and their association with older colleagues at work, they feel they have gained a better understanding about what is important in life and how the world works. Again, this increased level of maturity turns the potential disadvantage of having embarked on a career in manual labour into a "real world" advantage. I interpreted the ways in which the youth apprentices in my study stressed this advantage as an *ex post facto* strategy of biography reconstruction. Heinz et al. (ibid., 249), who identified similar approaches in a longitudinal study of young German's occupational choices, call this a process of self-socialization.

Overall then, one important finding in this study is the generally positive responses of apprentices regarding their employment potential and their future plans. Participation in youth apprenticeships was neither interpreted as creating life course disadvantages, nor was it understood as a result of socially or structurally-reproductive processes. Like their academic-track counterparts, youth apprentices believed that trying hard and having the determination and willingness to achieve something would guarantee that achievement. Wyn and Dyer (1999, 14) suggest that this overly optimistic (and often ambitious) outlook needs to be linked to a discussion of individualization, which in turn "implies an understanding of youth as an active process, rather than a stage of development." Given the underlying notion of individualization, namely that traditional, structured pathways are being rapidly eroded, young people need to rely on individual agency to establish (or envision) patterns "which give *positive meaning* to their lives" (ibid., 14, emphasis in original).

This form of individualization recalls notions of late modernity (Beck 1986; Giddens 1990), which also suggests that reproductive processes need to be accounted for individually (Furlong and Cartmel 1997). In other words, if youth deny that disadvantages in the labour market are the result of persistent class or gender inequalities, any problems are then to be found in the young people themselves. It therefore becomes much more important to recast participation in programs like RAP as the result of informed, active choice which promises a multitude of outcomes that are actually preferable to those achievable through, for instance, a university education. This raises a crucial question, one which has formed the backdrop to all the discussion in the last few chapters: do these strategies of construction and reconstruction imply increased agency? And given the pervasive theme of pride in manual labour as a reason for joining a trade, to what extent are these strategies still habitual? I will return to these questions in the final chapter.

Chapter 10

Choosing to Labour: Summary, Conclusions, and Implications

I don't really want to do an office job,
because I'd rather be out actually doing work.
Nick, Edmonton RAP student

I knew probably in Grade 9 I was never going to university.
Ted, Edmonton RAP student

People aren't interested in what you've done,
they are only interested in your diploma, and that's the thing.
Sven, Bremen apprentice

The above comments by Nick, Ted, and Sven succinctly reflect the key issues I investigated in this study of structure and agency in school-work transitions. Are youth apprentices like Nick actively engaged in decisions that reflect their own preferences and dispositions toward their careers and life course? Do youth apprenticeships increase the potential for agency by offering a non-academic alternative to more practically oriented students, thus allowing them to get a head start on gaining a positive, vocational identity? Or are we seeing, as might be the case in Ted's experience, a streaming process that formalizes a class-based reproductive process by removing lower-achieving, working-class high school students from the academic mainstream? And, following Sven's observations, how are individual behaviours and transition outcomes affected by institutional environments? Drawing on the concepts of habitus and cultural capital derived from the work of Pierre Bourdieu, but also applying macro-sociological frameworks like Gidden's structuration theory and Beck's notion of individualization in a risk society, my aim was to explain the persistence of social inequality in school-work transitions without foregoing agency. By doing so, I addressed large gaps in both social policy and theoretical debates about school-work transitions. Too often, policy debates lack an understanding of how programs like RAP may contribute to the reproduction of social inequality. Theoretically, treating structure and agency as a dualism has led to an overemphasis on either concept, depending on one's theoretical position, to the detriment of understanding school-work transitions as a process influenced by both institutional factors and individual agency.

I will begin this final chapter by briefly summarizing the central findings of my study before discussing in more detail its implications for both theory and policy in school-work transitions.

Summary of Findings

The Cross-National Context: Structural, Institutional, and Cultural Factors

This study was guided by a set of key research questions (see Chapter 4). My first research question asked about the structural, cultural, and institutional features that shape academic high school education and apprenticeship training in Canada and Germany. Two important differences between Canada and Germany characterize the institutional environment in which school-work transitions are situated. First, and most important, is the difference between Canada's comprehensive and Germany's heavily streamed, tripartite secondary education system. Second is the difference between Canada's opaque yet flexible, and Germany's transparent yet rigid labour market. In Germany, the streamed secondary school system feeds directly into the different forms of post-secondary education and training (e.g., graduates from the *Hauptschule* move into blue-collar and lower-level white-collar apprenticeships; graduates from the *Gymnasium* move into university or upper-level white-collar apprenticeships). Such a clear pattern of streaming in high school and post-secondary educational and occupational paths does not exist in Canada. At the same time, Germany's strong industrial and manufacturing sector have, at least in the past, allowed for successful and well-respected careers in manual and blue-collar employment—careers that have led to very stable, middle-class lifestyles and generally lower levels of income polarization. In contrast, employment in the trades in Canada tends to be considered as an inferior choice by young people and their parents, and there is a much stronger public perception that success is defined as a career in the professions.[38]

As a result, one would expect to find significant differences between my study participants in Canada (Edmonton) and Germany (Bremen)—differences in terms of social background, but also in terms of attitudes toward work in the trades, perceptions about the value of their work, confidence in their career choices, and processes of decision making. I have shown in this study that there were indeed differences, but that they were often far less pronounced than one would expect. The following sections summarize some of these differences and similarities.

Participation Patterns

My second research question asked who participates in academic high school programs and in youth apprenticeships in Canada and Germany, and whether the participants in the two streams are different in terms of class, gender, and cultural capital.

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[38] Undoubtedly, the overall patterns of inequality that result from these institutional differences could be further investigated for their role in the reproduction of social inequality. However, such a discussion was outside the scope of this dissertation. For a more in-depth discussion of income inequality in different industrialized nations, see Gottschalk and Smeeding (1997).

The quantitative findings addressing this question were clear: participation was affected by class status, whether measured as parents' educational attainment, occupational attainment, or income. In both Edmonton and Bremen, study participants whose parents had lower levels of educational and occupational attainment were more likely to be youth apprentices. Those whose parents had university education and worked in the professions were far more likely to be in the academic stream. Family income was also related to participation in either youth apprenticeships or academic programs, with children of above-average income families more likely to be enrolled in the academic stream, and children of below-average income families more likely to be youth apprentices. This finding was further confirmed by using various measures of the concepts of habitus and cultural capital to analyze the effect of class status on participation in either apprenticeships or the academic stream. For instance, youth apprentices were far more likely to have grown up in families in which manual skills were valued over intellectual skills. Most of these quantitative relationships between social status and program type (i.e., apprenticeship or academic) were more pronounced (and significant) for the Bremen participants, confirming the expectation that Germany's streamed education system leads to more socially reproductive outcomes than the comprehensive school system in Canada.

Youth apprenticeships also reproduce gender relations in the education system and the labour market. Participation in apprenticeships seems to largely conform to gender stereotypes, with only a very small minority of women apprenticing in traditionally male fields. These gendered patterns are reflected in my sample, as I was unable, in both countries, to find young women enrolled in traditional male apprenticeships. All female participants in the youth apprentice sub-samples apprenticed in hairdressing. As I have not had the opportunity to speak to young women in male occupations, I am unable to speculate about whether the structures and conditions of apprenticeship training create barriers for young women, for example through gender discrimination in the hiring process. However, their non-participation, and informal conversations I had with teachers and counsellors at schools, suggest that not much is being done to break down gender barriers.

Participants' Perceptions of Structure and Agency in their Transitions from High School

My third question asked to what extent young people themselves perceive their participation in either academic high school programs or youth apprenticeships as shaped by structural elements or as the result of active choice. Despite overwhelming quantitative evidence of social reproduction, the majority of participants in my study described their post-high school plans as being the result of independent and informed choice and decision making. Youth apprentices in both Edmonton and Bremen described their entry into trades occupations as the result of rational choice considerations (e.g., earning rather than paying money for an educational program, and getting a head start into a promising career) and vocational preferences (e.g., a preference for manual over intellectual work). Youth apprentices generally downplayed the influence of significant others like parents, siblings, peers, and teachers, unless they were also recognized as "credible" sources of vocational information (e.g., those with first-hand, working experience in the trades). Academic-track students were more likely to credit their parents with having an influence on their post-high school plans. In contrast, most youth apprentices saw themselves as having broken away from the "childish" environment at school and having entered the "adult" world of work. It was important for them to confirm this new-found adulthood by asserting, during the interviews and focus groups, independence over their decision. Academic-track students had not yet experienced this change in status and were therefore less concerned with establishing independence from influences in their home or school.

At first sight, it appeared as if the quantitative differences I had found between the Edmonton and Bremen participants disappeared in the qualitative findings. Participants in both cities were remarkably similar in how they described their independence and their dispositions. However, a closer look at the interview and focus group data did bring to light at least one important difference, confirming that the transparency of Germany's school-work transitions system creates conditions in which agency becomes possible (*Handlungsspielraum*), and in which young people can make informed and independent choices about career options and begin charting a clearly defined vocational life course path. It is thus possible for a *Gymnasium* student like Silke to plan on completing a white-collar apprenticeship in industrial design, while also knowing that she will eventually attend university in a related field. I also heard from youth apprentices who are fully aware of the options open to them upon completing their apprenticeship, and talked about upgrading their secondary education credentials and about continuing their training to the *Meister* level.

Still, this *Handlungsspielraum* for the young people in Bremen came at a cost, as those with the lowest levels of educational attainment (e.g., *Hauptschule* graduates) were faced with a severely limited range of options. Youth apprentices who had graduated from the *Hauptschule* spoke about their disadvantaged status in the labour market and the problems they encountered finding employers willing to hire them as apprentices. For the most disadvantaged, the streamed, tripartite school system clearly exacerbates social inequalities, through the deteriorating learning conditions in the *Hauptschule*, and the limited value of their school credential in the labour market. Still, once within their streams, individuals had a clear understanding of alternatives, structures, and processes. In contrast, the majority of Edmonton youth apprentices were uncertain about how their apprenticeship worked, how long it would take them to complete their program, and what subsequent employment and career options it created. I argue that their narratives of independence and choice were more likely a reflection of having entered a new stage in their life course, rather than having engaged in a fully informed, independent transition from school to work. This difference between the Canadian and German youth apprentices also explains why none of the German youth apprentices appeared to recognize how streaming may have affected this transition. Obviously, their earlier school placement by their parents had been internalized as a social reality outside their locus of control. Although initially limiting, these institutional structures had now become enabling.

Despite these differences in the institutional context of the two countries, individuals' explanations of their plans and dispositions were remarkably similar. Youth apprentices in both countries expressed a dislike for the abstract, theoretical aspects of academic education and a preference for the hands-on, applied, and manual skills they use in their apprenticeships. Youth apprentices in Edmonton and Bremen were also alike in their interpretation of manual, physical labour as "real work" in the "real world." Finally, all participants in my study, regardless of whether they lived in Edmonton or

Bremen, whether they apprenticed or were planning to attend university, asserted independence and control over their school-work transitions. While most acknowledged some outside influences on dispositions, all attributed the final decision to themselves. Furthermore, all participants rejected structural factors like class, gender, or ethnicity as having an influence over the achievement of life course goals. Instead, all agreed that school-work transition outcomes and the achievement of long-term career goals are based on individual effort, attitude, willingness, and ability.

Choosing to Labour: Reconceptualizing Structure and Agency

My fourth research question moved away from the more descriptive focus of the earlier questions and asked how we can interpret young people's own narratives of agency, given the obvious determining impact of structural factors. The previous chapters have revealed a complex and often contradictory relationship between structural constraints and individuals' own perception of their agency. Analysis of the survey data showed that participation in either youth apprenticeships or academic-track programs was strongly determined by socio-economic background and cultural capital. Specifically, young people from lower SES families reported lower levels of cultural capital and were more likely to participate in youth apprenticeships. Despite this evidence of structural reproduction of inequality, the subsequent analysis of interview and focus group data provided a much more nuanced picture. Both youth apprentices and academic-track students spoke about their choices, their decision-making processes, their ambitions, and their plans for the future in ways that suggested reflexivity and informed agency. As I suggested above, particularly the youth apprentices (in both countries) described their decisions to enter the trades as the result of rational choice calculations and vocational preferences. In addition, the survey data showed that youth apprentices and academic-track high school students felt that their career outcomes depend on individual motivation and effort, and are not restricted by structural factors.

These findings, of course, are neither new nor surprising. Rudd and Evans (1998, 41) summarize the dilemma created by such findings regarding structural reproduction and individual narratives of agency:

> An important methodological and epistemological discrepancy arises here. This is based around the possibility that there is a tension between an individual young person's responses to such questions [of agency] and evidence provided from broader social and economic trends and patterns. In other words, a young person will typically be optimistic and will say that he or she is in control of his or her life course and that occupational success is largely based on individual effort, whilst there may be a whole mass of data and theory, … which suggests that many young people, especially from particular social groups or 'trajectories', have only limited chances of 'success' (conventionally defined) in the labour market. This is just a particular manifestation of a classic problem for social and educational researchers: there is a possible discrepancy between individual/subjective viewpoints and larger-scale social and structural patterns and trends.

What is new, however, is my effort to consolidate, both theoretically and empirically, quantitative evidence of social reproduction with individuals' narratives of agency. In doing so, I hope to overcome the divisions of previous school-work transitions research that has either focused on structural determinants, or on rational or counter-cultural agency. In Chapter 3, I introduced the concepts of structured individualization (Roberts, Clark, and Wallace 1994; Rudd and Evans 1998) and bounded agency (Evans 2002), both situated within a late modernity theoretical perspective (Beck 1986, Giddens 1990) and also aimed at overcoming the dualism of structure and agency. Yet, both these concepts tend to theorize an imbalance between the effects of structure and agency, based on an individual's location in the social structure. Evans and Heinz (1995) have argued that the lack of material resources (i.e., lower-class status) impedes the degree to which individuals can engage in strategic risk taking, which is considered a necessary element of life course success in late modernity. In other words, social status continues to determine to what degree individualization will be structured and agency bound.

In contrast, I conceive of structure and agency as fully integrated and mutually constituted. Archer (1988) considers this mutually constitutive relationship between structure and agency as a fallacy of central conflation, meaning that denying structure and agency autonomy makes it impossible to actually analyze their interplay (Emirbayr and Mische 1998, 1003). Yet, I suggest that insisting on an analytical separateness of agency and structure would constitute a fallacy of autonomy. As I have pointed out earlier (see Chapter 4), it is critical to have an epistemological understanding of how to treat the narratives of young people in a study such as this. While I do not doubt that young people's claims of agency are a reflection of their beliefs about themselves at the point these narratives are created (e.g., during the interviews and focus groups), they nevertheless need to be seen in a larger, structural context that is outside their frame of reference. Consider, for instance, the findings of Meulemann (2001) who, in a longitudinal study, analyzed how *Gymnasium* graduates' perceptions of success in life changed throughout their life course. While still at school, and at the time of graduation, most agreed that class attributes (in this case, family of origin) played no important part in becoming successful. Instead, talent and hard work were seen as the key indicators of achieving personal and occupational success. In hindsight, by their mid 40s, graduates viewed the influences of family or origin (and luck, no less) as far more important than initially expected. Meulemann (ibid., 56-57) explains these remarkable findings by suggesting that

> Family of origin surely influences success in the life of a *Gymnasium* student more than the success in the life of a 30 or 43 year old. But it is not until one reaches 30 or 43 that one can see more clearly exactly how strongly family of origin influences the life course (my translation).

No human action can be conceived of as free of any structural elements. The participants in my study presented narratives infused with agency, choice, and control. Yet, their school-work transition dispositions were also characterized by the reproduction of social inequality. Based on these findings, I recommend a reconsideration of the concepts of agency and reproduction in school-work transitions research. Let me first illustrate this theoretical argument by explicitly referring to some of the central empirical findings of my study.

Choosing to Labour

Both the quantitative data gathered through the background survey and the qualitative data gathered through interviews and focus groups confirm that the vast majority of participants have embarked, or are about to embark, on school-work transition paths that can be considered socially reproductive. In other words, working-class participants were more likely to participate in youth apprenticeships, while middle-class participants were more likely to plan on studying at university. Given these findings, how can the dispositions, plans, and choices of participants in my study be interpreted as variously agentic? Should we assume, following theories of structural determinism, that dispositions and choices that lead to social reproduction were less agentic? And within this socially-reproductive category, should we make any normative distinctions between those who reproduce their advanced social positions and those whose decisions maintain a tradition of manual labour? Are only decisions that lead to upward social mobility truly agentic, as they suggest successful strategic risk-taking (as proposed by structured individualization) and a distancing from the habitual element of agency? And what are we to make of decisions that lead to social demotion, like the choice of young people with university-educated parents who nevertheless entered an apprenticeship? Although these individuals have obviously distanced themselves from the habitual element of agency, do their plans constitute successful risk taking and individualization?

I will begin answering these questions with reference to the latter group, whose relatively privileged SES suggests that their decision to enter a youth apprenticeship constitutes a form of downward mobility. Their decision falls outside what can be explained within rational choice and structural inequality theory (see Chapter 3). Yet, using the example of Ron and Carl, two Edmonton RAP students, we can see that their decisions were highly agentic. Both Ron and Carl have university-educated parents and rated their family income as above average. Both performed well at high school and are taking all the courses necessary to enter university. Yet, they have chosen, at least for now, to forego higher post-secondary education for apprenticeships in motorcycle mechanics (Ron) and welding (Carl). For both, this choice was the result of an interest in the work and the potential for exciting employment it offered.

Ron had already been involved in racing motorbikes in his spare time and saw entering the apprenticeship as a logical continuation, with the added benefit of getting paid and receiving credit. Similarly, Carl talked at length about training to be an underwater welder, allowing him to combine an interest in mechanics with his love for scuba diving. Both were well informed about the conditions and requirements of their apprenticeships and both had (short-term) plans for what they wanted to achieve in their chosen trades. However, both still kept open the option of going to university. As such, their choices to enter youth apprenticeship were neither terminal, nor in any way determined. Still, I consider their decisions habitual in the sense that their privileged social status allowed them to perceive of working in the trades as a way of continuing their hobbies in a more professional capacity, while not foreclosing the option of eventually choosing a more class-conforming alternative in the future. My portraying their choice as habitually informed was further confirmed by their outlook on the value of education, a view that set them apart from most of the other youth apprentices with a lower socio-economic background. Because of their relatively high levels of cultural capital, they saw the relevance of abstract, academic, and theoretical learning, and felt more strongly that low educational attainment would be a barrier to future occupational and life course success.

The study participants on the path to upward social mobility would be expected to show the clearest signs of agentic behaviour, both in the sense of leaving behind the habitual element of agency and in successfully taking strategic risks. Recall, for example, Nadine, the Edmonton academic-track high school student whose mother works as a cleaner in hotels. Although confident about her choice, she expressed concern about her lack of financial resources and not having immediate role models to assist her with the transition to university. Her decision to attend university can therefore be interpreted as structurally bound, as financial concerns, a lack of role models, and a lack of cultural capital put her in a more precarious, uncertain, and risky position. However, her resolve to attend university is also related to an understanding of her underprivileged situation and her aim to do better than her parents and her siblings. She clearly indicates that her mom's "failure" encouraged her to aim higher. Thus, Nadine's choice to attend university, or her agency, is the result of dispositions that are simultaneously informed by and transcend her social origin.

Yet, other examples of participants in similar situations demonstrated how ambiguity and uncertainty in dealing with present situations often arise out of the discrepancy between habitus and the demands of the situation. This was evident for Trent and Don, two Edmonton academic-track students whose parents are engaged in manual labour but nevertheless pushed them toward university. Their concern and uncertainty about what it means to go to university was evidence of a habitus that clashed with the demands of the present situation (whether to enrol at university and what program to choose), but also significantly affected the future, projective dimension of their agency. Unlike Nadine, and unlike most of their fellow academic-track students with university-educated parents who were quite certain about what to study and what to expect at university, the capacity for successful strategic risk taking of students like Trent and Don was significantly circumscribed by their habitus. While Nadine's own reflexive engagement with her underprivileged social status created dispositions to do well, Trent and Don found themselves somewhat at odds with their parents' hopes and wishes.

Although Trent did not doubt or question the benefit of going to university, his lack of cultural capital made him uncertain about what to study, what life at university will be like, and whether he will indeed be successful at university.

Trent has so far been unable to distance himself from the habitual confines of his past experiences. His lack of cultural capital, in turn, negatively affects his capacity to successfully engage in strategic risk taking. In contrast, Don is already somewhat reluctant to accept studying at university as his best choice. In fact, Don seems much more interested in working with cars and had also considered becoming a car mechanic. His own interests are thus much more aligned with his habitus. For now, however, Don has given in to his father, who has strongly advised him, out of his own experience as a house painter, against work in the trades. Trent and Don's experiences show that it would be misguided to automatically presume that career plans indicating upward social mobility are the result of a more agentic engagement with one's habitus and social environment. As a matter of fact, Trent and Don's plans to attend university were not only accompanied by uncertainty (Trent) and misgivings (Don), but they also showed far less evidence of reflexive agency compared to most of the study participants whose choices would be considered socially reproductive.

Many of the academic-track high school students with university-educated parents spoke with great enthusiasm and excitement about going to university. Some also spoke with great respect about their parents as role models. Anthony, an Edmonton student planning on following his father (and older sister) into engineering, spoke about how much his dad enjoys his work and how he envisions a similar life for himself. Lisa, an Edmonton student who wants to be a teacher like both her parents, even talked about how great it would be to work alongside her mother. Although the outcome of their transitions from high school are reproductive, those students were not propelled into these choices. Most actively sought information about different career options, or fields of study. Yet, none of the academic-track high school students with highly-educated parents ever seriously considered career alternatives like an apprenticeship.

Similarly, many youth apprentices had parents who themselves work in skilled trades or other forms of manual labour. Their decision to enter a youth apprenticeship can be easily categorized as structurally determined. However, the narratives of most youth apprentices were also full of agency, expressed as preferences for and interest in manual or physical work, anticipation of future employment possibilities, or simply as a way of gaining a head start into a promising career. Often, these narratives of essentially reproductive decisions were characterized by far more agency than was evident with participants whose plans suggested upward social mobility, as the example of Trent and Don showed. Yet hardly any of the youth apprentices saw higher post-secondary education as a possible alternative for them, either because their marks at school put university out of their reach, or because they did not see any value in a university education. In other words, although their decisions were not entirely structurally determined or void of agency, both the academic-track students and the youth apprentices whose transition plans reproduced their social status formed dispositions from a habitually limited range of possibilities.

My cross-national comparison further confirms these findings. As with the Edmonton participants, dispositions toward school-work transitions of the Bremen participants were informed by class habitus. We saw how most Bremen youth apprentices came from working-class backgrounds, in which parents (mostly fathers) had also participated in apprenticeship training, often in the same or similar occupations. We heard from youth apprentices like Steffen, who is training to be an auto mechanic like his father, and who talked about spending many hours, as a child, working on cars with his dad. We also heard from Julia, a young working-class Bremen woman who had actually started Grade 11 at the *Gymnasium*, who performed reasonably well at school, and whose parents, siblings, and teachers expected her to complete *Gymnasium* with her *Abitur* in hand. Yet, she decided to quit school and start an apprenticeship as a hairdresser, because she felt this career to be more in line with her family background and social environment.

However, there were some apparent differences. I found that structural and institutional factors in Germany had more pronounced socially reproductive effects. The quantitative analysis showed that the educational and occupational attainment of their parents more strongly influenced school-work transition outcomes for the Bremen participants, compared to those in Edmonton. I observed the same differences between Edmonton and Bremen participants for the importance of habitus and cultural capital on transition outcomes. For the Bremen sub-sample, the types of skills valued and fostered at home (e.g., intellectual versus manual skills) were more significantly related to participation in either apprenticeships or academic-track programs.

While these findings suggest that the institutional features of Germany's education system and labour market are very habitus-confirming, they also have habitus-modifying effects. Recall Sandra, the Bremen *Gymnasium* student who had completed an internship at a hair salon, even though she is planning to attend university. Since neither of her parents have participated in higher education, employment as a hairdresser might be seen as more congruent with her habitus. Although she enjoyed working in a hair salon, she also insisted that her time at the *Gymnasium* would have been wasted if she did not go to university. In Sandra's case, the institutional culture of the *Gymnasium* may have "overridden" social status.

Habitually-Reflexive Agency

I have shown, not surprisingly, that agency is always situated in a framework of institutions, objective structures, and cultural practices, and ideologies. Furthermore, agency is not only circumscribed by the social reality in which individuals live, but also by the way in which they construct and interpret this reality. I therefore propose that individuals engage with their structural, institutional, and cultural environment and history to form dispositions that reflect their understanding of their position in this social structure. I call this form of agency habitually-reflexive agency.

The findings I presented in Chapter 8 highlight a habitual form of agency. Individuals relied on their past experiences at home to develop dispositions toward certain career paths. Many of the male youth apprentices talked about "tinkering" at home with their fathers, grandfathers, or uncles and how these activities created and sustained interest in manual work. A substantial number of academic-track high school students agreed that there was never any question about their plans to go to university, how this was always a given. Although participants expressed a sense of intentional agency, the range of school-work transition alternatives realistically under consideration was limited by their past experiences. In other words, while their formation of dispositions was not mechanical or determined, it was clearly circumscribed by habitus. This offers a framework to explain individuals' sense of purposive agency, despite overall reproductive outcomes. Emirbayr and Mische (1998, 980) argue that even though individuals operate with a habitually limited range of options, their decisions remain intentional because

> it allows one to get things done through habitual interactions and negotiations (allowing Bourdieu to speak of the paradox of "intentionless intentions"). As Bourdieu notes, there may be much ingenuity and resourcefulness to the selection of responses from practical repertoires, even when this contributes to the reproduction of a given structure of social relationships.

The various strategies of construction and reconstruction I discussed in Chapter 9 are evidence of such essentially reproductive ingenuity and resourcefulness, as individuals explained, evaluated (in hindsight), and justified their decisions. I interpreted these findings as both forms of self-socialization and as *ex post facto* strategies to re-insert agency into essentially socially-reproductive transition processes. While maintaining a sense of independent decision making, dispositions about occupational choice were affected or corrected by the opinions of others and by the social and institutional contexts in which these decisions took place. At the same time, young people engaged in a reality check vis-à-vis their educational attainment in order not to aim too high or too low. More importantly, youth apprentices re-constructed their occupational choices as a reflection of vocational preferences, despite an overwhelming public discourse that equates occupational success with increasingly high levels of formal education. Youth apprentices talked about their decisions to enter the trades as giving them various advantages over their university-bound peers. These advantages not only included getting a head start into a career and receiving a good income earlier in their life, but were also extended to more general life course issues, such as becoming a more responsible and mature adult.

These strategies were not simply post-hoc rationalizations, but provide evidence that individuals actively engage with the structures and patterns that frame their dispositions and actions. Although the socially reproductive thrust of their dispositions and choices was not generally realized, the participants in my study did clearly understand and incorporate into their narratives where and how these dispositions were formed. This understanding and reflexive engagement with their habitus is an essential element of the projective or transformative dimension of agency. According to Emirbayr and Mische (ibid.), the projective dimension of agency relates to the generation of possible future trajectories in which the habitual element of agency might be creatively reconfigured. The authors argue that in order to understand the projective and creative dimension of agency, it is necessary to shift attention away from the actor's orientation to the past, or in other words, their habitus (ibid., 984):

> As they respond to the challenges and uncertainties of the social life, actors are capable of distancing themselves … from the schemas, habits, and traditions that constrain social identities and institutions.

However, this move from the past to the future dimension of agency is, in my opinion, a fallacy. I argue that individuals' potential for creative reconstruction and future projection is not achieved by an orientation away from the past, but by a reflexive understanding of the past. In other words, the projective dimension of agency, in its essence, has to be habitual. Reconceptualizing agency as both habitual and reflexive allows for the study of agency in processes that have structurally reproductive outcomes.

Thus, it is possible to understand young people's narratives regarding their decision to become youth apprentices as reflecting independent choices infused with agency, even though these choices are situated in a context of habitus, cultural capital, and class. For example, consider a working-class student who is performing well at school and could attend university, but instead decides to enter a youth apprenticeship program. At first sight, this would make a strong case for a form of bounded agency. It may be argued that the student's social background limits her ability to see the value of higher education and to take advantage of the possibilities studying at university could have provided. In other words, her capacity for strategic risk taking was circumscribed by her habitus. Such a form of bounded agency might be exacerbated by institutional factors like, for instance, Germany's streamed education system. Bourdieu (1990) has referred to such a situation in which opportunities exist but a person rejects them as inappropriate because of her habitus as hysteresis of habitus.

However, we would be missing some important points if we were to stop the analysis here and argue that social background, coupled with institutional constraints, led to a reproduction of social inequality. In contrast to bounded agency, habitually-reflexive agency suggests that this student's decision to not attend university and to enter an apprenticeship was based in a specific understanding and interpretation of her class habitus. In other words, her decision to maintain class status can be as agentic as somebody else's decision that leads to upward social mobility.

This understanding of agency within a reproductive process has been previously discussed by resistance researchers, most famously Willis (1977). However, unlike Willis's lads, who, in his own words, condemned themselves to a life of menial labour and drudgery through their resistance to the middle-class mobility ethic and school culture (ibid., 174), the majority of youth apprentices in my study interpreted their choice to enter the world of manual labour not only as a career move with future potential, but also as the expression of a preference for, and identity with, the ideals of manual work. There is no sense of condemnation here, just as there is no evidence of an all-encompassing anti-school ethos. Instead, youth apprentices see their entry into the trades as congruent with the formation of positive vocational identities and the possibility of a successful life course that is not in opposition to dominant middle-class ideals of education, mobility, and achievement. In other words, the narratives and perceptions of the young apprentices to whom I spoke overwhelmingly suggested that instead of "learning to labour," as Willis argues, they were *choosing to labour*.

Policy Implications

My final research question enquired about the policy implications of this study, about how the findings, particularly for Canadian youth apprentices, relate to the goals outlined in youth apprenticeship policy documents and debates. The findings presented in the previous chapters clearly have policy relevance. I will first address the more direct implications of my findings for RAP as a school-work transitions program and then provide some general policy suggestions regarding young people's transitions from secondary education.

Alberta's RAP was a policy response to the twofold problem of high levels of youth unemployment in the late '80s and early '90s and an unfulfilled demand for workers in the skilled trades. To the best of my knowledge, there are no data available to determine if the introduction of RAP has reduced the demand for skilled workers. However, I am able to comment on whether RAP has facilitated the school-work transitions of non-university-bound high school students. RAP was targeted at the so-called middle-majority of students—those neither likely to choose higher post-secondary education, nor at risk of dropping out or failing high school. There are debates as to whether RAP should be considered a stay-at-school program, and the real target group should be at-risk students who would benefit from a more practice-oriented, applied alternative to the academic curriculum.

The profile of participants in my study (Chapter 5) certainly showed that most tend to come from the middle majority. None of the RAP participants to whom I spoke ever considered dropping out of high school (although some did agree that RAP made it easier for them to stay at school), and most were reasonably successful at school prior to starting RAP. In other words, none of the RAP participants in my study could be labelled "at-risk" students. If the target group for RAP is students in the middle majority, my findings show that the target is indeed being met. If, on the other hand, RAP is to be a transition program that also aims at facilitating transitions into employment for more disadvantaged students, my study suggests that these students have not been reached. These participation patterns reflect the changing focus of RAP from a school-work transitions program concerned with high levels of youth unemployment to a program that more broadly addresses labour market demand in the skilled trades.

This focus on relatively high-achieving high school students is also congruent with a broader public discourse that aims at raising the status of careers in the trades. A program like RAP depends on the willingness of employers to take on high school students as apprentices, and the continuation of partnerships between schools and employers seems to rest on the schools' abilities to provide employers with "good" students (Lehmann and Taylor 2003). One of the participants in the study who had started RAP but who was not kept on by his employer past the initial probation period told about the employer hiring three high school students on probation, with the intention to keep only one as an apprentice. Obviously, this type of selection process raises some concerns about the potential of RAP for offering an alternative to those students most in need of school-work transitions assistance.

Alternative for Non-academic Students

One of the stated goals of RAP is to offer an alternative for non-academic high school students and to reduce the incidence of early school-leaving. Tanner, Krahn & Hartnagel (1995), in a study of Edmonton high school dropouts, confirm findings from other research that alienation from, boredom with, and rejection of the education system has led many young people to leave school early and to seek meaning in the adult world of employment. Although, as suggested above, none of the RAP participants had ever seriously considered dropping out, the following two excerpts from focus group discussions show how RAP does provide an alternative to students who are weary of going to school.

> (Edmonton RAP Focus Group, February 11, 2002):
> Dean: It might be a little more tempting to drop out before you had the RAP program than after. Because after you've been with the RAP program, you know what's out there for you. You know that there's work for you every day, and there's money for you every two weeks and that you can do it for however long, until you start to slow down. Whereas at school, if you never get into the RAP program, then you might just get so sick of school and not want to do it anymore.

(Edmonton RAP Focus Group, October 22, 2002):
Nathan: That's half the reason I took the RAP program. I was getting bored with school. I had no initiative to be here, I had no want to be here, to do anything. I mean, in reality, for me school was becoming a joke. And I decided that, listen, I'm doing nothing here. I mean I might as well do something with myself. At least do something that's doing something for me. And that was going out and getting a job. And I thought, why not go out, if I'm getting a job, why not let it have more than one benefit to myself. I'm getting paid, I'm getting the equivalent of a 30-level course, I'm getting credits. I mean, how can I complain with something like that?

These comments suggest that RAP participants realize at least two of the advantages RAP proponents associate with the program: restoring an interest in education, and facilitating transitions into the workplace. A third advantage, related to the first, is that by restoring an interest in education, students will be able to improve their marks and thus further increase their chances for a successful transition into post-secondary education. To a large degree, this is also related to RAP students' realization that, in order to continue their apprenticeship, they need to do well and graduate from high school (Edmonton RAP Individual Interview, November 28, 2001):

WL: Do you find that being in RAP motivates you more to push hard?
Curtis: Oh yeah, because I know that next semester, I don't have school. I just have to go to work and do what I do best, so…
...
WL: What would happen if you don't do well in any of those [four core subjects]?
Curtis: Then I have to be removed from the RAP program, but I don't intend on doing that.
WL: So, that's a real motivation there?
Curtis: Absolutely.

But restored interest in school also comes with a cost. I learned from his teachers that Curtis is actually not coping well with the dual responsibility of going to work and doing well at school. At the time of the interview, he was at risk of failing a number of his courses. Given that many teachers in the core subjects are not aware of RAP students' participation in the workplace (see Chapter 9), students like Curtis might find themselves in a very precarious situation indeed. Others, like Keith, one of the youngest RAP students to whom I spoke, struggle with the demands of putting in a hard day at work and going to school (Edmonton RAP Individual Interview, November 27, 2001):

> WL: Do you think being in RAP has made you more motivated to work hard at school?
>
> Keith: No, it makes me a lot more tired when I get home. I just want to sleep. I want to go to bed at 9 o'clock, because I wake up so early.

Nevertheless, Debbie, an Edmonton hairdressing apprentice, is representative of many of the Edmonton RAP students with whom I spoke and who saw the program as a "life saver" (Edmonton RAP Individual Interview, November 23, 2001):

> WL: If you hadn't had this chance to go into the RAP program, if that didn't exist. What do you think you would have done in high school? What would some of the alternatives have been for you, other options?
>
> Debbie: I honestly don't know. I don't know at all. Ever since I went into this RAP program, everything's been really good for me.

However, a central question remains. To what extent does RAP achieve its goal of integrating workplace experience and academic learning, and of truly making high school more relevant?

Integrating Workplace Experience and Academic Learning

Hamilton and Hurrelman (1993) argue that what makes youth apprenticeship programs (and other workplace-based learning programs) attractive is the fact that learning is integrated into everyday processes of the workplace, rather than constituting a "total pedagogic interaction," as is the case with school-based learning. Such an integrated view of vocational education is congruent with the discourse of *new vocationalism*, a more "progressive" approach to vocational education that rejects academic-vocational divisions and promotes the idea that all workers need to be "knowledge workers." Instead of focusing on narrowly defined occupational preparation and the goals of immediate employment, the vision is for vocational education to become broader and better connected to academic content, and more critical of workplace practices and systems of employment (Grubb 1996, 3). This emphasis on an expanded concept of skills (including, for example, communication and critical thinking skills) aims to overcome more narrow and conservative ideals of education centred around set content or curriculum. Similarly, Benson (1997) argues for an integration of academic and vocational learning with the ultimate objective of actually acquiring "more, not less academic knowledge" by "embodying the pedagogical strengths of vocational education into the presentation of theoretical concepts" (ibid., 202).

I have shown how RAP does indeed encourage students to stay at school and to see more relevance in what they are required to learn. However, what emerged in my findings is a rather uncritical acceptance of the program's educational and ideological functions. The policy discourse on RAP has been exclusively focused on providing linkages into the workplace and has lacked discussions about its educational purposes (Lehmann and Taylor 2003). Despite RAP's ideological roots in new vocationalism, the program has yet to achieve its educational potential. At the moment, there is an almost exclusively one-sided adjustment (the student adjusting to the culture and discipline of the workplace), lacking any form of integration into curriculum. But it is exactly this integration that would be extremely useful for dealing with new conflicts, understanding new social relations, and being aware of one's rights in the workplace (Hamilton and Hurrelman, 1993, pp. 205-206).

There are, to my knowledge, no courses that allow RAP students to discuss with other students and teachers their experiences in the workplace (Edmonton RAP Individual Interview, November 23, 2001):

> Diana: … no one ever really talks to me about the work I do, here at school.
> WL: You don't talk to any of your teachers or counsellors about what happens at work and the things you do at work?
> Debbie: No, just Mr. [work experience co-ordinator], actually. That's the only person I talk to about it.
> WL: And what kind of things would you talk about?
> Debbie: Like, sometimes, I'll be walking down the hall and he'll see me and say "How is work?" Just that kind of stuff.
> WL: In the two, three months at work, have you learned anything, any values, any skills that you think will be useful for you at school?
> Debbie: …[pause – laughs nervously] … Going to work and going to school are two different things. They are two different things. I can't really say.
> WL: So, you don't see them very connected at this point?
> Debbie: No.

The claim that work experience makes academic content more meaningful and motivates students to work harder is therefore exclusively based on RAP participants' own realization of this relationship. It is consequently difficult to argue that RAP constitutes an effective integration of vocational and academic learning. Some students are able to make this connection in that they feel more motivated to do well at school and to complete the core courses needed to remain in RAP. But other students' attitudes toward education and high school were far less affected by their participation in RAP (Edmonton RAP Individual Interview, November 29, 2001):

> WL: Do you think in the last year and a half that you have been in RAP, did your grades go up, go down, stay the same?
> Tyler: Pretty much stayed the same.

WL: Do you think that being in RAP has motivated you to work harder in school than if you weren't in it?
Tyler: No.
WL: Do you think being in RAP has made it more difficult?
Tyler: Made school more difficult?
WL: Yeah.
Tyler: No, just the same. Same old stuff.
WL: Why not?
Tyler: Why not what?
WL: Why didn't it become more difficult?
Tyler: Well because school is school. It's the same, no matter what.

Rather than achieving an integration of academic and practical learning, most students see in their RAP participation a chance to escape from the academic requirements of mainstream high school. Given that some RAP students actually spend up to seven consecutive months of the year exclusively in the workplace (summer plus one semester), programs like RAP may actually have the potential to exacerbate the segregation of vocational and academic learning (Lehmann and Taylor 2003). It is precisely this segregation of school and work, and the reduced amount of time spent at the school, that attracts some students to RAP (Edmonton RAP Focus Group, February 11, 2002):

Ted: It was more or less, I guess, that I didn't have to go to school for a full year. I just had to go half a year [laughs] and that sounded kind of interesting to me. Actually, you work half a year and you go to school half a year. So, that's the best part.
Dean: Yeah, that's the best part of it.

A related problem is the lack of learning objectives in RAP. What RAP students do at work does not seem to be regulated by any lesson or learning plans that the school may have discussed with employers. This makes it particularly difficult for youth apprentices to come to terms with their new roles as employees and workers. Tim, who apprentices as a millwright in Edmonton, is talking about relationships with co-workers at his workplace. Earlier in the interview, he suggested that older workers have little patience for somebody as young as him and that he tends to get along better with his younger colleagues (Edmonton RAP Individual Interview, November 22, 2001):

WL: Yeah, how does that work out for you? Being at work where most of the people you work with are a lot older than the people you're with at school or that you usually hang out with?
Tim: It's a lot different, because the young people, they kind of know what it's like to go through that phase. But some of the older people look at you different. Because you're such a young kid and they think that you shouldn't be in there or something.
WL: Oh, is that right? You get the sense that ..
Tim: Where I work, some people give you a lot of attitude.
WL: Really. Is that difficult to overcome? Does that change over time?
Tim: Well, I've been working there for … just about a year now, and I haven't really seen a change.

…

Tim: …[the younger workers] ... we try and help each other out. Like if we have questions or we're having problems with something, we'll like talk about and see if we can figure this thing out before we actually go to our boss or something. Because, there's times when we go to our boss and ask questions and he looks at us like "You should know what to do." He looks at you like you're dumb.
WL: Even though you're just learning.
Tim: Yeah. We're supposed to be learning, but sometimes, like, he'll take out his anger on us. It's … sometimes it's just hard to put up with. But it's something you got to put up with, 'cause you're just learning.

Tim's last comments are of particular interest. He argues that you have to "put up with, 'cause you're just learning." But this reverses the expectations; should you not expect more lenience because you are learning? Or is Tim actually suggesting that you have to learn to put up with exploitative social relations at work? If this is what he means, and I believe it is, the school system's failure to integrate workplace experiences into curriculum and to inform students not only about their responsibilities, but also about their rights in the workplace, becomes even more critical. The following comments by

Riley, who apprentices as a millwright, support this argument (Edmonton RAP Focus Group, October 22, 2002):

> WL: Were you treated like an adult [when you started work] …?
>
> Riley: I don't know, you're pretty much the little toby that runs around, cleans their stuff. I don't know, pretty much, they ask you to do something, you do it … like, as fast as you can, as good as you can … be nice to them. Instead of cleaning something and leaving it on the bench, you take it back to him and say "here's your parts, where would you like them?" And they'll tell you where to put them. There are some people who just clean them and set them on the bench; "yeah, your parts are back there on the bench, they're clean." Then, they're like "yeah, whatever, you can clean all my other stuff too then." If you like try to help them, organize everything, make everything nice for them, then it shows them that you have initiative to actually do good. And then you'll get ahead and actually work on something, instead of sitting there, mopping the floor, washing stuff. Some people, all they do is wash the company trucks, because they had no initiative. They sweep the floor, you know, put no real effort into it. If you sweep the floor, put some effort into it, make it look like you care about what you're doing, then they'll be like "oh, this guy actually cares, he's doing something … anything he does, no matter if it's a good job he likes to do, or a shitty job like taking out the garbage. He still puts the same effort into it."

This uncritical acceptance of power relations at work raises serious concerns about the value of a program that is essentially part of the students' high school education and should therefore have some pedagogical value. However, students usually are not given a chance to discuss and reflect on these workplace social relations at school. Neither are they always aware of their rights at work.

In contrast, the vocational schools German apprentices attend include courses in social studies that inform students about labour laws and their rights in the workplace. Not only does this give apprentices a chance to talk to each other and compare their experiences to those of others, they also receive information about their rights in the workplace. Vocational school teachers are in regular contact with employers about the welfare of apprentices, rather than having as their main concern the maintenance of amicable relationships between the school and the workplace. A group of Bremen apprentice hairdressers explains (Bremen Apprentices Focus Group, May 7, 2002):

> Connie: I think it is very important, the way the dual system here works. For the first 1 ½ years we were at vocational school two days per week, and now in the last 1 ½ years only one day. But I think that's quite good, because it brings in a little more variety.
> Julia: Also, you can talk to others about what you do.
> Anne: You also start making new friends.
> Julia: I don't know, in the beginning I found it very helpful that I was able to compare what I do with the others. I would say "hey, I've been washing hair for three weeks, doing perms, colouring hair, stuff like that; do you do more, or what's up?"
> Susanne: For example, our social studies teacher really pays attention that everything goes as it should during our apprenticeships.
> Connie: Yes, he gives really good advice. He gives you information about everything, about all the rights we have. That's really very helpful.
> Susanne: He helps when you have trouble at work. For example, I had a real problem, that I was owed money, with a lawyer and everything. And he went ahead and wrote a letter for me.

Given the co-determining roles of unions in Germany's dual system, apprentices are also covered by collective agreements and are members of and have access to the union's services. In Alberta, workplaces are either not unionized at all, or the unions regard youth apprentices with suspicion, since they are concerned about how the employment of these young people might affect their more senior members (Taylor and Lehmann 2002).

Policy Suggestions

Traditionally, vocational education has focused on assisting students with their decisions about careers and their transitions into employment, providing them with the skills needed to obtain and keep employment, providing an alternative educational environment for "underachieving" or more practically minded students, and (increasingly important in Alberta's current construction-boom climate) solving skilled labour problems (Kincheloe 1999). Although there is, to my knowledge, no evidence that vocational education programs have reduced skilled labour shortages (at least in North America), the original policy debates about RAP were certainly aimed at these issues. However, as I have argued above, what is missing from these debates is an understanding of the educational function RAP should fulfill. At a minimum level, RAP students should be provided with a venue in which to "debrief" their workplace experiences.[39]

These classroom meetings could be facilitated by a qualified teacher or counsellor who would also provide specific information on responsibilities and rights in the workplace, labour laws and regulations, apprenticeship regulations, unions, and workplace safety. Youth apprentices have some very concrete and immediate learning needs that are very different from those of their academic-track peers, and that cannot be adequately dealt with in the mainstream curriculum. My interviews with German youth apprentices, who do have these types of meetings and courses at their vocational schools, showed how important it was for them to find out what other apprentices were doing at work, how one's own workplace compared to others, and how one's treatment in the workplace compared to that of others. Without this understanding of workplace rules and regulations, youth apprentices are open to forms of exploitation against which they have no recourse or which they may not even recognize.

Although youth apprentices in RAP are formally indentured with the Alberta Apprenticeship and Industry Training Board, my interviews showed that few had any idea what being an apprentice really meant. Again, before entering an apprenticeship through RAP, interested students should receive much better information about what their participation will entail. Furthermore, schools and employers (together with the Alberta Apprenticeship and Industry Training Board) should draw up more detailed learning plans for the time students spend in the workplace. This would help teachers/work experience co-ordinators supervise and follow students' progress at work, and would formalize employers' commitment to entering into a work and learning/teaching relationship with students.

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[39] Given the relatively low enrolment rates in RAP in individual schools, this may not be possible at the student's own school. However, school boards could facilitate meetings at regular intervals (e.g., once a month or every two weeks) at a central or rotating location.

Policy-makers should also address a number of gaps in RAP. It appears that unions have not been involved in RAP, neither in its design nor in its implementation. Partly, this is the labour movement's own fault, as it appears to have decided to remove itself from many of the negotiations and policy debates (Taylor and Lehmann 2002). However, the industry-driven nature of RAP leaves little doubt as to which workplace partner is in the driver's seat. If unions were to participate in RAP more fully, a more critical perspective on workplace social relations could be fostered from the outset.

There appears to be little effort to increase participation in RAP by women, members of ethnic minorities, and disabled individuals (Taylor and Lehmann 2002). I was unable to find and interview any young women apprenticing in traditionally male occupations. Much more research is needed to investigate why, for example, so few women choose careers in the trades, and to what extent this gender imbalance is related to gender role socialization or hostile workplaces (see Gaskell 1992). In addition, the demands of employers to receive students in good standing also means that students at risk of failing in high school are unlikely to gain entry into the program, even though programs like RAP are presented as a way of helping students with academic performance problems. In order to be more inclusive, RAP would need to work more closely with different partner groups (e.g., Women in the Trades, an Edmonton-based foundation promoting the employment of women in trades occupations) and employers.

My final policy suggestion is less immediately concerned with specific programs like RAP and brings me back to the more theoretical concerns regarding reproduction of social inequality. It centres on what Kincheloe (1999, 183) calls "vocational education for jobs and justice." Critiquing the hidden political and ideological practices of processing, labelling, and stratifying vocational students, Kincheloe proposes a form of vocational education that confronts questions of social justice and oppression. In one sense, my earlier suggestion to provide RAP students with instruction regarding their rights at work, and the rules and regulations guiding labour in Alberta, already addresses some aspects of vocational education for social justice. Kincheloe (ibid., 183) goes beyond these more immediate and instrumental concerns and suggests that a truly progressive form of vocational education "helps students make sense of the economic, social and cultural relations that influence their workplace performance and sense of possibility for the future." Just as academic-track students are encouraged to critically engage with their social and economic environment, vocational programs like RAP should include issues of social justice that would give these young people not only manual skills, but also social skills to understand the conditions and contradictions of capitalist production and reproduction (Shilling 1987, 407).

The Future of Germany's Dual System

A few policy comments are in order regarding Germany's dual system. It is somewhat ironic that youth apprenticeships have attracted considerable interest in North America in the past decade, just as the future of the dual system is increasingly being questioned in Germany. I believe that it is important that policy-makers in North America are aware of these debates in Germany as they are relevant to North American school-work transition problems.

In the past, academic education and vocational education prepared young people for different jobs in different segments of an organization. This differentiation between vocational and academic education has been regarded as a key advantage of the German post-secondary educational system as it opens career alternatives for young people with different academic aspirations and capabilities. However, differentiation between academic and vocational demands has become increasingly fluid. Changing skill requirements in the workplace caused by new technologies and different organizational structures are said to emphasize individuality, problem-solving skills, and other skills more traditionally associated with academic careers. In contrast, training in Germany's dual system has been described as outdated and archaic, narrowly skill-based, and more concerned with antiquated virtues of discipline, punctuality, and cleanliness than with the more broadly defined demands of new workplaces (Geißler 1994).

Furthermore, streaming at the secondary education level as well as associated channelling into different career tracks is perceived as being at odds with the changing aspirations of young people in a more open and fluid society (Buechtemann, Schupp and Soloff 1994). The reform and expansion of the education system since the late '60s has led to more participation in higher education. This also means that employers can increasingly draw on university-educated people to fill middle-level positions which were traditionally part of the career path for graduates from the dual system (Heidenreich 1998, 331). Not only does this recruiting strategy compromise the attractiveness of vocational training, it also undermines German employers' own position as defenders of the status quo in workplace-based vocational education.

Greinert (1994b) argues that a rational strategy to save the dual system has to consider at least two dimensions. First, revision of wage agreements in the private and public sector is necessary, as is the lowering of wage privileges of academic positions. Second, integrated educational paths should be established in the form of doubly qualifying programs within a form of dual system. Graduates from an apprenticeship program would be allowed (usually limited) access to universities and polytechnics. University-based programs/courses could be integrated to complement vocational training, allowing for an upgrading of skills and qualifications and eventually leading to better chances of promotion, without the individual having to attend university for a complete four to five year academic program. It is argued that if young people have the choice between entering *Gymnasium* and only receiving an academic university entrance qualification or entering a program in a dual system and receiving both a vocational training and university entrance qualification, educational choices could be significantly changed (ibid., 370). While this last point is actually reflected in Canadian youth apprenticeship programs, Greinert acknowledges that in Germany this would lead to the dissolution of the traditional *Gymnasium* and the whole streaming process—a prospect that currently doesn't appear to be a realistic option.[40]

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[40] See Lehmann (2000) for a more in-depth discussion regarding the future of Germany's dual system.

Future Research Needs and Suggestions

In this study, my main goal was to explore and interpret young people's individual understanding of the structural factors that might influence their formation of dispositions toward post-secondary education and employment, and how their agency might be implicated in the reproduction of social inequality. Despite the many research findings presented above, there are still factors affecting school-work transitions that remain unaddressed. I have argued for an interconnectedness between structure and agency, for a concept of *habitually-reflexive agency* that is situated in its structural context and to a large degree an expression of habitus. However, no matter how much theory is bent and twisted, the experiences, attitudes, and behaviours of some participants defy easy classification. For instance, what are the conditions that push some students with a relative socio-economic disadvantage to do better and seek out higher education (like Nadine in Edmonton), while others (like Julia in Bremen) choose to apply their agency to more inequality-reproducing plans? It is at this point that a more in-depth analysis of individuals' social environment and context would probably shed additional light on these extremely complex processes.

This study has relied exclusively on the perceptions of young people in the process of making the transition from high school themselves. This data collection strategy was necessary, given my goal of analyzing constructed narratives and what they reveal about structure, agency, and habitus. However, having acquired this knowledge, a follow-up study with a smaller sample of high school students that would investigate their social and institutional environments more closely would be very helpful. Such a study could include in-depth interviews with parents, siblings, peers, teachers, counsellors, and employers. All these groups have an impact on choices about transitions from high school, acknowledged to various degrees by the young people in my study. It would be useful to find out how members of these groups perceive their influence, and how their own narratives might support or contradict those of the students. There is a wealth of literature in social psychology that investigates, for instance, parental and peer group influences on child development and personality. This research tradition might shed more light on the formation of educational and occupational aspirations and dispositions (Graber, Brooks-Gunn and Petersen 1996; Mortimer and Finch 1996; Mortimer, Lorence and Kumka 1986; Silbereisen and Todt 1994), or the development of identity and adult personalities (Coté 2000; Coté and Levine 2002). Such ethnographic data would add to our understanding of structure and agency in school-work transitions and could refine the explanatory capacity of a concept like habitually-reflexive agency.

Such a follow-up study could also include an observational component in which individuals would be observed at school and, in the case of youth apprentices, in their workplaces. In particular, this would provide more insight into the individual strategies that re-insert agency into the structurally-reproductive transition processes I discussed in Chapter 9. If, at the same time, a larger survey of high school students in their graduation year could be carried out, the qualitative and the quantitative data could be triangulated to increase the insights into the complex processes of social reproduction in school-work transitions. Conceiving these studies as longitudinal would be important for two key reasons: 1) to study the effects of social reproduction during school-work transitions on the subsequent life course; and 2) to investigate how individuals' perception of the interplay between structure and agency changes over time. Will youthful confidence be replaced by an adult resignation that sees structural factors as more determining? And how would such a change in perception depend on social class, the extent of social reproduction during school-work transition, and a subsequently successful life course?

I have already commented on the relative absence of women in programs like RAP. Through my comparison of young women in Germany and Canada, I have begun to understand how the intersection of institutional and cultural factors with gender creates powerful habitually-informed dispositions. Yet much more research is needed to understand how gender influences dispositions toward transition from high school in various spheres, like the home, school, and peer group. Future research could focus, in particular, on women in male-dominated youth apprenticeships, to investigate what enabled their decision and what created barriers. Such a project would require a more strategic sampling process, and would be best carried out as a smaller, ethnographic study that investigates, as much as possible, the social, cultural, and structural environment of these young people. Most importantly, such research should investigate the influence of gender role socialization, but also look at the degree to which male-dominated workplaces are open or hostile to women. It is also worth noting that young women have made tremendous gains in educational attainment and now outnumber men in undergraduate university enrolment (Statistics Canada 2000b). Considering the average higher income potential of university and college graduates, compared to those trained in the apprenticeship system (see Chapter 2), it would appear that young women have picked up "human capital signals" accurately. However, official statistics also show that women are still concentrated in female-dominated academic subjects and occupations, both of which offer lower levels of return on their educational investment. Further research should take a closer look at the complex relationships between gender, vocational and academic education, and occupational attainment.

Finally, my reconceptualizaton of agency as habitually-reflexive suggests that we should reconsider our own understanding of reproduction processes, which are rooted in middle-class notions of social mobility and meritocracy. Why do we consider the decision of a plumber's son (or daughter) to become a plumber a social problem, but not that of a lawyer's daughter (or son) becoming a lawyer? Would it be more desirable if the plumber's child spends ten years in possibly alienating institutions of higher education to become an unsuccessful lawyer, even though he or she might be happier doing physical work? Why did even Willis (1977) feel compelled to consider his lads condemned, while at the same time celebrating their rebellion? Is reproduction necessarily a problem, if much of it can be explained as the result of habitually-reflexive agency?

I need to stress that this is not a functionalist argument that suggests that because we need plumbers and carpenters and hairdressers, because we will always need to build homes and our hair will always grow (as these young people often argue themselves), who better to fill these positions than the sons and daughters of those who have always fulfilled these functions. This is most certainly not the argument I wish to make. And, given the findings of this study, I am not oblivious to the fact that a great many young people might end up doing this work because they could not find anything else, which is hardly the condition for positive identity formation along the lines I am discussing here. However, there is no denying that much of the social inequality we discuss under the umbrella of structural reproduction hinges on the different life course outcomes of individuals from different socio-economic backgrounds and in different vocational trajectories. In other words, there is ample evidence that individuals with a higher socio-economic status will enjoy more stable careers, higher incomes, better health, and longer life. But is this necessarily a result of a reproductive vocational choice, or the result of the social and economic values placed on these choices? It is, after all, our value system that typically celebrates intellectual achievement over physical and manual competence. What creates social stratification in the first place is therefore not a reproductive choice, but a system that affords such different rewards to different accomplishments. In this regard, even the most well-intended and critical research tends to walk into a "hegemonic trap" that takes for granted certain capitalist relations of production and ideologies in which participation in manual labour has to be considered "problematic." Thus, we need to ask ourselves if we can reduce social inequality by only promoting upward mobility, or would it not first be necessary to look at the ways in which different forms of work receive such different recognition, both socially and economically? Maybe we should take a moment and ponder this hypothetical situation: It is minus 30 Celsius in January (this is Canada, after all), your heating and plumbing system has just broken down, you are sitting in your cold home, and both your plumber and your former sociology professor are enjoying themselves on a Caribbean cruise. Who will you miss more?

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Appendix A: Basic Structure of the Education System of the Federal Republic of Germany

School Types					***Education Level***	***Age***
Continuing Vocational Education (e.g., Trade and Technical Schools)	*Fachhochschule* (Polytechnique)	Universities			*Higher Education*	*20*
Dual System	Full-time Vocational Education Schools	*Fachoberschulen*	*Fachgymnasium* (Specialized Grammar Schools)	*Gymnasium* (Grammar Schools) Grade 11-13	*Secondary Education Stage II*	*19* *16*
Hauptschule (Secondary Modern/General Schools) Grades 5-9	*Realschule* (Intermediate Schools) Grades 5-10	*Gymnasium* (Grammar Schools) Grades 5-10			*Secondary Education Stage I*	*15* *10*
Grundschule (Primary Schools)					*Primary Education*	*9* *6*
Kindergartens					*Pre-school*	*5* *3*

Notes:
There are variations to this structure in the different *Länder*. For example, in some *Länder*, the first two or three years of Secondary Education Stage I (grades 5-7) constitute a non-streamed orientation stage.
Age refers to earliest possible entry.
Size of fields not proportionate to number of participants.

Source: Bundesministerium für Bildung und Wissenschaft (1994)

Appendix B: Sample Parental Consent Letter

October 7, 2002

Dear ____________________________:

I am writing to request permission for your child to participate in a research project I am currently carrying out as part of my dissertation at the University of Alberta.

I am researching how young people make decisions regarding high school programs and further education or employment after high school. I am particularly interested in the factors that contribute to a young person's decision to enter specific programs or streams in high school and the factors that contribute to his or her career goals. Some of the questions ask about who encouraged or discouraged certain decisions (e.g., the influence of parents, siblings, teachers, friends, etc.), how much individuals know about the requirements of certain career choices, and how external factors influence choice (e.g., the type of school, previous employment, media, etc.).

The study has been reviewed by the Faculty of Arts Research Ethics Board at the University of Alberta and has met with all research ethics guidelines. Your child might participate in a focus group discussion with a number of other high school students, to be carried out at your child's school. The focus group discussion will be audio taped and last approximately 45 minutes to one hour.

I would like you to know that once you agreed to your child's participation in this study, actual participation is still absolutely voluntary. Your child can choose not to answer individual questions and is free to withdraw from the interview or focus group entirely at any time. I can also assure you that all answers will be kept strictly confidential. Nobody, except for myself, and my academic supervisor, will have access to your child's responses. I will be using pseudonyms in my dissertation, which will make it impossible to trace back answers to individual participants.

Some of the data gathered for this project may also be published in academic journals. As in my dissertation, all participants will only be referred to by pseudonym and cannot be identified. Furthermore, data gathered in this research will be destroyed according to the following schedule: tapes will be destroyed once they have been transcribed (generally within a month after the interview or focus group took place); transcripts will be destroyed five years after completion of the dissertation.

If you have any questions or concerns about your child's participation in this study, please feel free to contact me directly at (780) 990-0107 or e-mail me at wlehmann@ualberta.ca. You may also contact my academic supervisor at the University of Alberta, Dr. Harvey Krahn. You can reach him at (780) 492-3315 or via e-mail at hkrahn@ualberta.ca.

If you do agree with your child's participation in this study and with the conditions outlined above, please sign and date the attached form and give it to your child to bring to the focus group. In any case, I can assure you that I will not include your child in this study unless I have received your consent.

Thank you for your cooperation in this research project.

Wolfgang Lehmann
Department of Sociology
University of Alberta

Appendix C: Sample Parental Consent Form

PARENTAL CONSENT FORM

Interviewer: **Wolfgang Lehmann**
Department of Sociology; University of Alberta
Edmonton, Alberta, T6G 2H4

Interviewee: ______________________________

As the parent of the Interviewee, I have been fully informed of the following points:

1. My child will participate in a focus group discussion. All focus groups will be audio taped and last 45 minutes to one hour.

2. My child's participation in this research is completely voluntary and I understand the intent and purpose of this research.

3. I understand that my child's identity will be kept confidential.

4. I know that my child may refuse to answer any questions and that my child may withdraw from the interview or focus group at any time.

5. I am aware that others will be reading the results of this research and that this research will eventually be published. In any publication, my child will not be identified by name.

6. The data gathered in this research will be destroyed according to the following schedule: tapes will be destroyed once they have been transcribed (generally within a month after the interview or focus group took place); transcripts will be destroyed five years after the completion of the dissertation.

7. Additional conditions for my child's participation in this research are noted here:

____

____

Date: ______________________

Name (print): ______________________________

Signature: ______________________________

Appendix D: Sample Participant Consent Letter

October 7, 2002

Dear ____________________________________:

I am a doctoral student at the University of Alberta. As part of my dissertation, I am conducting a study about how young people make their decisions regarding high school programs and further education or employment after high school. I am particularly interested in the factors that contribute to your decision to enter specific programs or streams in high school and the factors that contribute to your career goals. Some of the questions will ask about who encouraged or discouraged your decisions (e.g., the influence of parents, siblings, teachers, friends, etc.), how much you know about the requirements of certain career choices, and how external factors influenced your choice (e.g., your school, previous employment, media, etc.).

I appreciate your agreement to participate in this study and would like to inform you of what that participation implies.

I will be asking you to participate in a focus group discussion. All focus groups will be audio taped and last 45 minutes to one hour.

I would like you to know that participation is voluntary and that you may choose not to answer any questions or withdraw entirely from the interview (focus group) at any time. I can also assure you that all your answers will be kept strictly confidential. Nobody (except for myself and my academic supervisor, Dr. Harvey Krahn) will know your individual responses. I will be using pseudonyms in my dissertation, reports and other publications generated from the data, which will make it impossible to trace back any of your answers to you. The data gathered in this research will be destroyed according to the following schedule: tapes will be destroyed once they have been transcribed (generally within a month after the interview or focus group took place); transcripts will be destroyed five years after the completion of the dissertation.

Please sign the attached form if you agree to participate in this research project and accept the conditions outlined above. Thank you for your cooperation.

Wolfgang Lehmann
Department of Sociology
University of Alberta

Appendix E: Sample Participant Consent Form

FOCUS GROUP CONSENT FORM

Interviewer: **Wolfgang Lehmann**
Department of Sociology; University of Alberta
Edmonton, Alberta, T6G 2H4

Interviewee: ____________________

Date: ____________________

As the Interviewee, I have been fully informed of the following points before proceeding with the interview:

1. I will participate in a focus group discussion. All focus groups will be audio taped and last approximately 45 minutes to one hour.
2. My participation in this research is completely voluntary and I understand the intent and purpose of this research.
3. I understand that my identity will be kept confidential.
4. I know that I may refuse to answer any questions and that I may withdraw from the focus group at any time.
5. I am aware that others will be reading the results of this research and that this research will eventually be published. In any publication, I will not be identified by name.
6. The data gathered in this research will be destroyed according to the following schedule: tapes will be destroyed once they have been transcribed (generally within a month after the interview or focus group took place); transcripts will be destroyed five years after the completion of the dissertation.
7. Additional conditions for my participation in this research are noted here:

____

____

Signatures.................... Interviewee ____________________

Interviewer ____________________

Appendix F: Sample Questionnaire (Edmonton RAP Sub-sample)

QUESTIONNAIRE - RAP

I appreciate your time in filling this out – THANK YOU!
All information will be kept strictly confidential. Please do not write your name on this survey.

1 Age ______________________

2 Sex

Male	1
Female	2

3 With whom do you currently live?

With both my parents	1
With my father only	2
With my mother only	3
By myself	4
With others (not parents)	5 (Specify: ______________________)
	(e.g., boyfriend/girlfriend, spouse, roommates)

4 What is your ethnic background?

Caucasian (white)	1
African Canadian	2
Hispanic	3
Asian	4
Aboriginal	5
Other	6 (Specify: ______________________)

5 In what country were you born?

____

6 In what country was your father born?

____

7 In what country was your mother born?

____

8 Do you consider yourself to be:

a) an aboriginal person Yes 1
No 2

b) a member of a visible minority Yes 1
No 2

c) disabled Yes 1
No 2

PARENTS/FAMILY

9 Are your mother and/or father currently: ***Please check all that apply.***

	Mother	**Father**
Working full time	☐	☐
Working in one part-time job	☐	☐
Working in several part-time jobs	☐	☐
Unemployed	☐	☐
Homemaking	☐	☐
Retired	☐	☐
Attending school	☐	☐
Other (specify)	☐	☐
Don't Know/Not Applicable	☐	☐

10 What is your mother's current job and your father's current job. Be as specific as possible (e.g. sales, clerk, welder, electrician, manager, etc.). If either is presently unemployed, please describe their last main job.

Mother's Job	**Father's Job**

11 What is each of your parent's **highest** level of education? ***Please circle the number that applies to your mother and to your father.***

	Mother	**Father**
Less than high school	1	1
High school diploma	2	2
Apprenticeship	3	3
Technical Institute (e.g., NAIT)	4	4
Community College (e.g., Grant McEwan)	5	5
Some University (not finished)	6	6
University Degree	7	7
Don't Know/Not Applicable	9	9

12 On average, a family in Canada earns approximately $45,000 per year. Compared to this average, how would you rate your family's financial situation?

Below Average	1
Average	2
Above Average	3
Don't Know	9

13 Growing up, in which of the following activities did you participate? ***Check as many as apply.***

Read literature (e.g., novels, etc.) ☐
Read newspapers and magazines ☐
Write (letters, diary, stories, etc.) ☐
Learn a musical instrument ☐
Listen to pop and rock music ☐
Play sports ☐
Go to classical music concerts ☐
Go to movies ☐
Go to the theatre ☐
Do physical work (building, farming, etc.) ☐
Listen to classical music ☐
Go to the museum ☐
Other (specify)________________________________
____
____

14 On a scale from one to 5, with five indicating very important, how important do you think are the following skills in your family? Please circle the number that best describes the importance of the skill. ***Please circle the number that applies to you.***

	Not at all Important				**Very Important**
a Working with your hands (building things, working around the house, fixing cars, etc.)	1	2	3	4	5
b Doing artistic things (draw, paint, play a musical instrument, etc.)	1	2	3	4	5
c Being good at sports	1	2	3	4	5
d Reading difficult and important books	1	2	3	4	5
e Being able to speak and express yourself well and convincingly	1	2	3	4	5

15 Are you currently taking CTS courses?

Yes	1
No	2

16 On average, what were your grades in grade 10?

80% or above	4
65% to 79%	3
50% to 64%	2
Under 50%	1

17 On average, since grade 10, have your grades at school:

Improved	3
Stayed the same	2
Declined	1

18 For each of the following statements about your high school education, please indicate how strongly you agree or disagree. ***Please circle the number that applies to you.***

	Strongly Disagree				**Strongly Agree**
a What we learn at high school will be more important to getting a good job than any work experience	1	2	3	4	5
b Generally, I enjoy high school	1	2	3	4	5
c I'd rather have a job than be at school	1	2	3	4	5
d My teachers support me to do well at school	1	2	3	4	5
e Sometimes I feel that I don't really fit in at school	1	2	3	4	5
f My parents support me to do well at school	1	2	3	4	5
g We don't really learn in high school what is important to me	1	2	3	4	5

19 Below are a number of reasons why people may choose certain careers. How important are these for your own career goals? ***Please circle the number that applies to you.***

	Not at all Important				**Very Important**
a Relationship with co-workers	1	2	3	4	5
b Good long-term career opportunities	1	2	3	4	5
c Good job security	1	2	3	4	5
d Good pay	1	2	3	4	5
e Opportunities for promotion	1	2	3	4	5
f Being able to work with hands	1	2	3	4	5
g High social status	1	2	3	4	5
h Interesting and challenging work	1	2	3	4	5
i opportunities to learn new skills	1	2	3	4	5

20 Some people have said that no matter how hard you work at school and how hard you try to find a job, there are other things that hold you back. Do you agree with this statement?

Agree	1	***Go to question 21***
Disagree	2	***Go the questions 22***

21 In your opinion, what are the kinds of things that hold people back from achieving their best? ***Please check all that apply***.

a Not having a university degree ☐
b Not having the right connections ☐
c Not being a white person ☐
d Being a women ☐
e Not having enough money ☐
f Not being from an "upper-class" family ☐

g other: ____________________
____
____
____
____
____

22 On a scale from 1 to 5, with five indicating very important, generally how important do you think are the following for achieving career goals. ***Please circle the number that applies to you.***

	Not at all important				**Very important**
a High level of education	1	2	3	4	5
b Family background	1	2	3	4	5
c Where you live	1	2	3	4	5
d Race or ethnicity	1	2	3	4	5
e Gender	1	2	3	4	5
f Economic situation (e.g., unemployment rate)	1	2	3	4	5
g Having the right attitude (e.g., willingness to work, motivation)	1	2	3	4	5
h Friends and peers	1	2	3	4	5
i Having connections	1	2	3	4	5
j Supportive teachers	1	2	3	4	5
k Supportive employers from current or previous jobs	1	2	3	4	5
l Money	1	2	3	4	5
m Being willing to make some sacrifices	1	2	3	4	5
n Being flexible (for example taking just about any job to get a "foot in the door")	1	2	3	4	5

RAP

23 Which of the following people encouraged or discouraged you to enter RAP? ***Please check all that apply/***

	Encourage	**Discourage**	**Not relevant**
Father	☐	☐	☐
Mother	☐	☐	☐
Brother(s)	☐	☐	☐
Sister(s)	☐	☐	☐
Other relatives	☐	☐	☐
Teachers	☐	☐	☐
Work Experience Coordinators / Guidance Counselors	☐	☐	☐
Friend(s)	☐	☐	☐
Employer(s)	☐	☐	☐
Others (specify)	☐	☐	☐
______________________________	☐	☐	☐
______________________________	☐	☐	☐

24 Why did people encourage you? ***Check as many as apply.***

Good Pay	☐
Job Security	☐
Good Career Opportunities	☐
Good Working Conditions	☐
Prestige of Future Job	☐
Same type of education/training they have	☐
Program needed to get job they recommend	☐

Other (specify) ____

25 Why did people discourage you? ***Check as many as apply.***

- Low Pay ☐
- Lack of Job Stability ☐
- No Career Opportunities ☐
- Poor Working Conditions ☐
- Low Prestige of future job ☐
- They didn't know about this type of education/training ☐
- Program not needed to get job they recommend ☐
- Other (specify) ______________________________

26 For each of the following statements about RAP, please indicate how strongly you agree or disagree. ***Please circle the number that applies to you.***

	Strongly Disagree				**Strongly Agree**
a I am learning the skills I need in today's workplace	1	2	3	4	5
b I am getting the support I need from my parents to do well in RAP	1	2	3	4	5
c The things I learn at work are more important than what I learn at school	1	2	3	4	5
d I get along with my work colleagues	1	2	3	4	5
e I am getting the support I need from my employer to do well in RAP	1	2	3	4	5
f I enjoy what I do at work	1	2	3	4	5
g I prefer going to school to being at work	1	2	3	4	5
h Once I finish my apprenticeship, I will look for a job in this area	1	2	3	4	5
i I am confident that my apprenticeship will help me find a good job	1	2	3	4	5
j Because of my apprenticeship, I will not need to go to university to get a good job	1	2	3	4	5

Appendix G: Interview Guide (Edmonton RAP Sub-sample)

INTERVIEW/FOCUS GROUP GUIDE– RAP STUDENTS

I. WARM UP / INTRODUCTION

Tell me a little bit about your program.

- *How does it work*
- *How long have you been in it?*
- *What occupation are you in?*
- *How's your work?*
- *Are you currently at work or at school?*

II. STRUCTURE: SOCIAL CONTEXT

1. Own Decision-making/Overall Influence

What do you like about RAP?

Why did you choose to enroll in RAP?

1. *External reasons (structure?)*
- *Parents' (father/mother) preference*
- *Teachers' suggestions*
- *Marks (good/bad)*
- *Friends' influence*

2. *Internal Reasons (agency?)*
- *Type of skills in the program (manual vs. mental)*
- *Income*
- *Lifestyle*
- *Class consciousness (?)*

Did you ever consider alternatives/other programs/other courses?

Did anybody encourage or discourage you to enter RAP?

- *Father/Mother/Sibling(s)/Other family*
- *Friends*
- *Teachers/Counselors*
- *Former Employers*

Who, in the end, do you think were the most important people that **ENCOURAGED** you to participate in RAP?

Why did they **encourage** you to participate in RAP?

- *Pay/Security*
- *Career opportunities*
- *Working conditions*
- *Status/prestige*
- *Similar to what they've done/Better than what they've done (e.g., parents)*

Who, in the end, do you think were the most important people that **DISCOURAGED** you to participate in RAP?

Why did they **discourage** you to participate in RAP?

Probe if necessary:
- *Pay/Security*
- *Career opportunities*
- *Working conditions*
- *Status/prestige*
- *Not familiar with this type of career/education*
- *Think I can do better*

Where did the people that influenced you suggest you should go after you finish RAP (e.g., university, college, apprenticeship, immediate work, housework, etc.)?

2. Parents

Thinking about your parents in particular, what part do you think they played in your decision to enter RAP?

What do they think about you being in RAP?

Have they been supportive?

YES	**NO**
How did they support you? Probe if necessary:	Why did they **not** support you?

How did they react when you chose to enter RAP? / Where they concerned about your progress at school?

Did you have to convince them that RAP is a good thing? / Did they have different plans or hopes for you? If yes, what?

Have any of your parents ever been an apprentice in a trade? / Have any of your parents been to university?

How about older siblings? Apprenticeship or university?

How did your parents find out about RAP? (e.g., CNG, teacher, participant him/herself) / Did they understand what apprenticeship means?

3. Teachers/School Counselors

Thinking about your teachers or school counselors/work experience coordinators in particular, what part do you think they played in your decision to enter RAP?

Have they been supportive?

YES	**NO**
How did they support you?	Why did they **not** support you?

Did they have different plans or hopes for you? If yes, what were/are their plans?

Do you think you receive the support to do well in RAP from your teachers? ***If no, why not?***

Did your teachers/counselors know about RAP? Did they recommend RAP to you?

Did they understand what apprenticeship means? Where they concerned about your progress at school?

Generally, what is your relationship with your teachers/counselors?
Probe if necessary:
- *Do your teachers know you're in RAP?*
- *Do your teachers understand why you are in RAP?*
- *Do you get along with your teachers?* ***If no, why not?***

4. Friends

What do you think your friends will be doing after high school?
- *Go to work directly*
- *Do an apprenticeship*
- *Go to college/technical institute*
- *Go to university*

Are any of your friends currently in RAP?

<table>
<tr><th colspan="2">YES (how many?)</th><th>NO</th></tr>
<tr><td colspan="2">Did you start RAP at the same time? Did you decide to go into RAP together?</td><td rowspan="4">What are they doing? Are they in academic programs?
How do they feel about you being in RAP?
What did they think when you decided to go into RAP?
Did they try to discourage you?</td></tr>
<tr><th>YES</th><th>NO</th></tr>
<tr><td>Who do you think had more influence on the decision? Whose idea was it?</td><td>Who started first, you or your friend?</td></tr>
<tr><td></td><td><i>If friend started first:</i>
Did your friend try to convince to do RAP? Why or why not?</td></tr>
</table>

How often do you get together with your friends outside school (friends can be either school friends or others)? → What do you do when you get together?

Do you think you're missing out on fun with your friends from school, now that you work as an apprentice? If yes, does that worry you?

Have you made any new friends at your apprenticeship?

If yes: Are they other apprentices? → Are they RAP, or older than you?

How do you get along with your co-workers at your apprenticeship?

Do you find it a problem that they are older than you?

Do you spend time with your co-workers outside work
If no: why not (Probe: school commitments, not allowed (parents), not interested)
If yes: what do you do (Probe: go to bars, sports, do other work) → is hanging out with friends from work different than with friends from school

Do you think working as an apprentices has changed your relationship with your old friends? →
If yes: how/why (Probe: do you feel more mature/grown up?)

III. STRUCTURE: SOCIETY CONTEXT

1. School Achievement

In what grade are you currently?

Are you currently enrolled in academic high school courses?

YES

What courses?

NO

Where you ever enrolled in academic high school courses ?
Are you planning on enrolling in academic courses in the future?

On average, since grade 10, how have your grades changed (improved, stayed the same, declined)? ***If change:*** What do you think is the reason for the change?

Have you ever thought about dropping out of high school?

YES

How close where you to dropping out?
Why did/do you want to drop out?

- *Don't need high school for what I want to do*
- *Work too much outside*
- *Employer thinks I should quit and work full time*
- *Need money right now*
- *Can't stand school any longer*

What kept you from dropping out?
Are still thinking of not finishing high school?

NO

Why not?

2. Previous Work Experience

What kind of work experiences have you had before RAP?

- *Summer job*
- *Part-time job during year*
- *Work experience placement*
- *No work experience → Why?*

Do you think your previous work prepared you for the work you do as an apprentice? If yes, how. If not, why not?

3. Economic & Labour Market & Education System Structures

What are your plans once you've completed high school?

- *Complete RAP*
- *Don't complete RAP and find a job immediately without further education*
- *Go to university, community college, technical institute (e.g., NAIT, SAIT)*
- *Have a family and stay at home*
- *Start own business*
- *Take some time off*

If UNIVERSITY is mentioned:

What are your most important reason for wanting to go to university?

Can you see any problems that might keep you from going to university?

YES **NO**

What problems do you see?

- *too expensive*
- *grades*
- *parents*
- *Nobody in my family has been to university*
- *None of my friends will go to university*

If UNIVERSITY is NOT mentioned:

Would you like to go to university at one point in your life?

YES

What are your most important reason for wanting to go to university?

Can you see any problems that might keep you from going to university?

YES **NO**

What problems do you see?

- *too expensive*
- *grades*
- *parents*
- *Nobody in my family has been to university*
- *None of my friends will go to university*

NO

What are your most important reason for **not** wanting to go to university?

Do you currently have a career goal? ***If yes***: What is your career goal? *(make sure it is specific → probe if necessary)*

Why is this career attractive to you? Why did you choose this occupation as your goal? ***(Note: If the respondent doesn't have a career goal, ask what would be important in a career or job)***

Probe if necessary:

- *Good long-term career opportunities*
- *Good job security*
- *Good pay*
- *Being able to work with hands/head/ideas, etc*
- *Interesting and challenging work*
- *Social status of job/career*
- *Work environment/Colleagues*
- *Continuing family tradition*

How much do you know about the type of work involved in the career/job you want?

Do you think you need more education than your apprenticeship to achieve your career goal?

How likely do you think it is that you will achieve your career goal?

LIKELY	**UNLIKELY**
What makes you sure you'll achieve the goal?	Why do you think it is unlikely?
Probe if necessary:	*Probe if necessary:*
• *No problems getting into the necessary program*	• *Can't afford education needed*
• *Parents support me*	• *Grades not good enough to get education needed*
• *Already know other people doing this work*	• *Parents don't like it*
• *Good job prospects*	• *Nobody I know has ever done this before*
• *Have good connections*	• *No work in this field*
• *Already have a job lined up*	• *No connections*

Do you think not going to university will hold you back in life? Why or why not?

IV. CULTURAL CAPITAL/HABITUS

1. Home/Family

Growing up, what type of activities did you do in your free time?

Probe if necessary:

- *Read (books, newspapers, etc.)*
- *Write (letters, diary, stories, etc.)*
- *Learn a musical instrument*
- *Listen to pop and rock music*
- *Play sports*
- *Go to classical music concerts*
- *Go to movies*
- *Go to the theatre*
- *Do physical work (building, farming, etc.)*
- *Listen to classical music*
- *Go to the museum*

In your family, do you think doing things with your hands (e.g., fixing and building things) are more important than doing things with your head (like reading, drawing, playing an instrument)?

Was it important in your family to have strong opinions for yourself and to express them or defend them against others?

What type of things do you talk about at home?

Probe if necessary:

- *Sports*
- *Politics*
- *TV, movies*

2. SCHOOL

Generally, how do you feel about high school/being a student? Do you think you fit in well at school? Why or why not?

- *Not interested in what is being taught*
- *Would rather be working*

What topics do you enjoyed most at school?

- *Vocational ed/shop courses vs. academic-type courses*

Do you think that what you learn at high school will be more important to getting a good job than any work experience *(probe about apprenticeship with RAP students)?*

Do you prefer being at school to working? Why or why not?

How has being an apprentice changed your outlook on your education?
Probe if necessary:

- *School more relevant (understand better why certain things are learned)?*
- *Need diploma to continue apprenticeship? → motivation?*
- *School even less relevant now?*

Do you enjoy being an apprentice?

- **If yes**: What are some of the best things about being an apprentice?
- **If no**; why not?

4. LIFESTYLE

Do you think working has made you more mature? Why or why not. If yes, how do you notice?

If more mature is mentioned: how has that affected your relationships with your friends at school?

When you compare yourself to other kids in high school, for example those who plan to go to university, do you think you are a very different person from them?

YES	**NO**
What makes you different from them (or them different from you)? Probe if necessary:	Why not? Probe if necessary:

Do you think they have it easier in life? ***If yes***: why?

Would you rather be one of them? ***If yes***: why?

Are you planning on getting married and having a family?

YES	**NO**
By what age do you think you will be married and have kids?	Why not? (Probe if necessary)